# STORIES OF THE FOOT-HILLS

MARGARET COLLIER GRAHAM

Ashton Gardiner
From the Clarkes

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BY

MARGARET COLLIER GRAHAM

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# STORIES OF THE FOOT-HILLS.

## THE WITHROW WATER RIGHT.

### I.

LYSANDER SPROUL, driving his dun-colored mules leisurely toward the mesa, looked back now and then at the winery which crowned its low hill like a bit of fortification.

"If I 'd really had any idee o' gettin' ahead o' him," he reflected, "or circumventin' him an inch, I reckon I 'd been more civil; it 's no more 'n fair to be civil to a man when you 're gettin' the best of 'im; but I hain't. I don't s'pose Indian Pete's yaller dog, standin' ahead there in the road ready to bark at my team like mad, has any idee of eatin' a mule, much less two, but all the same it 's a satisfaction to him to be sassy; an' seein' he 's limited in his means of entertainin' hisself, I don't

begrudge him. And the Colonel don't begrudge me. When a man has his coat pretty well wadded with greenbacks, he can stand a good deal o' thumpin'."

The ascent was growing rougher and more mountainous. Lysander put on the brake and stopped "to blow" his team. Whiffs of honey-laden air came from the stretch of chaparral on the slope behind him. He turned on the high spring-seat, and, dangling his long legs over the wagon-box, sent a far-reaching, indefinite gaze across the valley. There were broad acres of yellowing vineyard, fields of velvety young barley, orange-trees in dark orderly ranks, and here and there a peach orchard robbed of its leaves, — a cloud of tender maroon upon the landscape. Lysander collected his wandering glance and fixed it upon one of the pale-green barley-fields.

"It 's about there, I reckon. Of course the old woman 'll kick; but if the Colonel has laid out to do it he 'll do it, kickin' or no kickin'. If he can't buy her out or trade her out, he 'll freeze her out. Well, well, I ain't a-carin'; she can do as she pleases."

The man turned and took off the brake,

and the mules, without further signal, resumed their journey. Boulders began to thicken by the roadside. The sun went down, and the air grew heavy with the soft, resinous mountain odors. Some one stepped from the shadow of a scraggy buckthorn in front of the team.

"Is that you, Sandy?"

It was a woman's voice, but it came from a figure wearing a man's hat and coat. Lysander stopped the mules.

"Why, Minervy! what 's up?"

"Oh, nothin'. I just walked a ways to meet you." The woman climbed up beside her husband. "You 're later 'n I 'lowed you 'd be. Something must 'a' kep' you."

"Yes, I come around by the winery. I saw Poindexter over t' the Mission, an' he said the old Colonel wanted to see me."

"The old Colonel wanted to see *you*, Sandy?" The woman turned upon him anxiously in the yellow twilight. The rakishness of her attire was grotesquely at variance with her troubled voice and small, freckled face. "What did he want with you?"

"Well, he *said* he wanted me to help

him make a trade with the old man,"— Lysander sent a short, explosive laugh through his nostrils; "an' I told 'im I reckoned he knowed that the old woman was the old man, up our way."

"Oh, I 'm glad you give it to 'im that way, Sandy," said the woman earnestly, rising to her habiliments. "Mother 'll be prouder 'n a peacock of you. I hope you held your head high and sassed him right and left." Mrs. Sproul straightened her manly back and raised her shrill, womanish voice nervously. "Oh, I hope you told him you 'd stood at the cannon's mouth before, an' was n't afraid to face him or any other red-handed destroyer of his country's flag. I hope you told him that, Sandy."

"Well, I was n't to say brash," returned her husband slowly and soothingly. "It would n't do, Minervy; it would n't do." Lysander uncoiled his long braided lash and whipped off two or three spikes of the withering, perfumed sage. "I talked up to 'im, though, middlin' impident; but law! it did n't hurt 'im; he 's got a hide like a hypothenuse."

Mrs. Sproul drew a long, excited breath.

"I wish mother 'd been along, Sandy; she 'd 'a' told 'im a thing or two."

Lysander was discreetly silent. The sage and greasewood ended abruptly, and a row of leafless walnut-trees stretched their gaunt white branches above the road. Here and there an almond-tree, lured into premature bloom by the seductive California winter, stood like a wraith by the roadside. They could see the cabin now. A square of flaring and fading light marked the open doorway. The mules quickened their pace, and the wagon rattled over the stony road.

"Talk about increasin' the value o' this piece o' property!" the man broke out contemptuously. "I told 'im it would take a good deal o' chin to convince the old woman that anything would increase the value o' this ranch o' hern, and danged if I did n't think she was right. I 'd pegged away at it two years, an' I could n't."

"What did he say to that, Sandy?" demanded the woman, with admiring eagerness.

"Say? Oh, he said the soil was good. An' I 'lowed it was, — what there was of it; an' so was the boulders good, for boulders, —

the trouble was in the mixin'. 'Don't talk to me about your "decomposed granite,"' says I: 'it 's the granite what ain't decomposed that bothers me.' But pshaw!" — and Lysander dropped his voice hopelessly, — "he ain't a-carin'. I 'd about as soon work the boulders as try to work him; he 's harder 'n any boulder on the ranch."

The mules turned into a narrow road, and stopped before the stable, a shackly, semi-tropical structure, consisting of four sycamore posts and a brush-covered roof. The lower half of the firelit doorway beyond suddenly darkened, and there was a swift, scurrying sound among the bushes that intervened between the house and the shed. A succession of heads, visible even in the deepening twilight by reason of a uniform glimmering whiteness, appeared in the barnyard.

Mrs. Sproul ran over the number with a rapid maternal calculation.

"Where 's the baby, Sheridan?"

"Grammuzgotim."

Lysander climbed out of the wagon, and came around to his wife's side.

"Shan't I h'ist you down, Minervy?"

She gave him her hand, and stood beside him for an instant, meditatively, after he had lifted her to the ground.

"I guess I won't say nothin' to mother till you come in, Sandy. Be as spry as you can with the chores. Mebbe M'lissy 'll milk the cow fer you."

She turned, and went up the walk toward the house, her mannish attire and the glimmering white heads that encircled her faintly suggestive of Jupiter and his attendant moons.

The sea-breeze had died away, and the wind was blowing in cooler gusts from the mountain; breezes laden with the aromatic sweetness of the bay-tree and the heavy scent of the shade-loving bracken wandered from far up the cañon into the cabin and out again, only to find themselves profaned and sordid with the smell of frying bacon.

A high, energetic voice was making itself heard even above the sizzle of the meat and the voice of a crying baby.

"What under the sun makes ye set up that yell every night jest at supper-time? Ye ain't a-lackin' anything, as I kin see, exceptin' a spankin', and I 'm too busy to

give ye that. Hark! There comes your mammy, now. Straighten up yer face and show 'er what a good boy you 've been."

Thus adjured, the baby brought his vocalizing to that abrupt termination indicative of feeling not so deep-seated as to be entirely beyond control, and scrambled toward the door on all fours, breaking in upon the approaching planetary system, a somewhat dimmed and bedraggled comet. Mrs. Sproul picked him up, and looked around the room questioningly.

"What 's M'lissy doin', mother?"

"Dawdlin'," answered the old woman, with a curtness that was eloquent, lifting the frying-pan from the stove, and shaking it into a more aggravated sputter.

"Is she upstairs?"

"I s'pose so. She gener'ly is, when there 's anything doin' down."

Mrs. Sproul put her hand over the baby's mouth and called upward, "M'lissy!"

There was a sound of slow moving above, plainly audible through the unplastered ceiling, leisurely sliding steps on the stairs, and Melissa appeared in the doorway. She was still elevated above them by two or

three steps, and leaned against the casement, looking down into the smoke and disorder of the room with a listless, irresponsible gaze. A tall, unformed girl, with a braid of red hair hanging across her shoulder, and ending in a heavy, lustrous curl upon the limp folds of her blue cotton dress.

The baby had resumed a subdued but dismal proclamation of the grief from which his mother's return had afforded him but a temporary relief, and Mrs. Sproul elevated her thin, anxious voice coaxingly.

"Lysander 's late, M'lissy, and I thought mebbe you 'd milk the cow fer 'im."

"Why, yes, of course," answered the girl, with a soft, good-natured drawl, descending the remaining steps slowly. "Where 's the milk-pail, mother?"

"On top o' the chimbly," answered the old woman tartly, pointing with the frying-pan to a bench in the corner. "If it 'd 'a' been a snake, it 'd 'a' bit you."

The young girl crossed the room, and the satellites surrounding Mrs. Sproul's chair, with an erratic change of orbit, transferred themselves to the newcomer. The older

sister took a handkerchief from the pocket of her coat.

"You 'd best tie this around your neck, M'lissy; it 's gettin' chill."

The girl accepted it carelessly, and stood in the doorway tying the bit of faded silk about her round, white throat.

"Where 's the cow, mother?"

"She 's staked on the 'fileree, t' other side of the barn. If ye don't find her when ye git there, come an' ask." The old woman drawled the last three words sarcastically.

Melissa smiled, showing a row of teeth, not small, but white and regular.

"Oh, if she 's got away, I know where she 's gone."

"Yes, I 'll bet you do. Some folks has a heap of onnecessary learnin'."

There was no demand upon Melissa's supply of undervalued information. The cow was mooing reproachfully in a cropped circle of musky alfilaria behind the shed. The moon had risen, and rested for an instant upon the edge of Cucamonga, like a silver ball rolling down the mountain-side. Melissa laid her arms on the spotted heifer's

back, and gazed at the landscape dreamily. Not discontent, nor longing, nor vague, troublesome aspirations mirrored themselves in the girl's placid face. Gentle, ease-loving natures, that might show in fair relief against a delicate background of luxury, become dull and lifeless in contrast with the coarser tints of poverty. In the parlance of those about her, Melissa was "dawdlin'," — and those about us are likely to be just, for they speak from the righteous standpoint of results.

The moon had floated high above Cucamonga, — so high that every nook and fastness of the mountain lay revealed in her soft, nocturnal splendor; even the tops of the mottled sycamores, far below in Sawpit Cañon, were touched with a vague, ghostly light; and still the council that sat in Lysander Sproul's kitchen was loud-voiced and shrill. The children, huddled in a corner that they might whisper and giggle beyond the reach of manual reproof, had fallen asleep, a confused heap of dejected weariness. The baby's head hung at an alarming angle from his father's arm, and

even the acrid, high-pitched notes of his grandmother's voice failed to disturb the sleep of bedraggled innocence.

"So he 's a-wantin' to develop the cañon, is he? Time wuz when you 'd 'a' thought that cañon wuz good enough even fer him, from the lawin' and the lyin' and the swearin' he done to git his clutches onto it. Well, if he wants to improve it, why don't he improve it? Nobody 's goin' to hender."

"That 's what I told 'im," answered her son-in-law, taking the pipe from his mouth, and sending a halo of blue smoke about the head of his slumbering charge. "He said he wanted to improve the water. 'Nobody 's goin' to kick at that,' says I; 'if they do, they 're fools. I think the old lady 'll tell you to go ahead. I should n't be s'prised, though,' says I, 'if she 'd add that the water o' Sawpit Cañon 's good enough fer her without any improvin'.'"

Mrs. Sproul glanced at her mother triumphantly.

"I told you Sandy talked up to him, mother. Oh, I do *wish* you 'd 'a' wore your uniform, Sandy; then you could 'a'

rose up before him proudly, an' told 'im you 'd fought the battles of your country before" —

"Oh, shucks, Minervy!" interrupted the old woman dejectedly; "what does Nate Forrester care for anybody's country? What else 'd he say, Lysander?"

"He said — well" — the man hesitated, and hitched his high shoulders a trifle uneasily — "he swore he hated to do business with a woman."

Spots of a deep, coppery red glowed through the tan of the old woman's cheeks.

"He said that, did 'e, Lysander Sproul? Then he must 'a' found some woman hard to cheat. Nate Forrester don't hate to do business with nobody he can cheat. The next time you see 'im, tell 'im it 's mut'-chal."

"I told 'im that," answered Lysander grimly. "I told 'im he did n't hate to do business with the hull female sect no worse than this partikiler woman hated to do business with him; but I reckoned you would n't bother 'im if he wanted to go to work on the cañon, — that 'd be onreasonable."

"He hain't no notion o' doin' that," as-

serted the old woman contemptuously. "Ketch him improvin' anybody else's water right. We 're nothin' to him but sticks to boil his pot. What 's he up to now?"

"Well," rejoined Lysander skeptically, "he *said* he wanted to divide that upper volunteer barley-patch into ten-acre lots and put it onto the market. An' he b'lieved he could double the water right by tunnelin'."

"Why don't he tunnel away, then? Nobody 's a-carin'," demanded the old woman shrilly.

"That 's what I told 'im; and he 'lowed, of course, he was n't a-goin' to put money into another feller's water right. An' then he figured away, showin' me how it 'd increase the value o' this piece o' property; an' I told 'im this property was 'way up now," — Lysander sneered audibly, — "consider'ble higher 'n most folks wanted to go; an' then he went to blowin' about it, braggin' up the ranch, an' tellin' what a big thing he done when he give it to you" —

The old woman broke in upon him fiercely.

"Did he say that, Lysander?" She turned, and bent upon her son-in-law a

quick, wrathful glance from under her shaggy brows; the muscles of her weather-beaten face twitched nervously. "I'd 'a' give my right hand to 'a' heerd 'im. I'd like to have Colonel Nate Forrester try to say anything to me about givin' anybody this ranch." She measured her words bitingly. "I s'pose when a feller puts his pistol at yer head, and tells you to hold up yer hands, and goes through yer pockets, if he happens to overlook a ten-cent piece he *gives* ye that much, does 'e? That 's the way Colonel Nate Forrester *give* me this ranch. Loss Anjelus County had n't heerd o' him when I settled onto this claim, and it ain't heerd no good of 'im sence."

The old woman's harsh, discordant voice rose higher with her wrath. The baby stirred uneasily in his father's arms. Even Melissa raised her eyes, — Melissa, who sat on the lowest step of the projecting staircase, twisting and untwisting the faded blue silk handkerchief in her lap with a gentle, listless monotony. It was impossible to tell whether ignorance or indifference characterized the girl, so calm, so inert, so absent was she, sitting in the half-shadow of the

dimly lighted corner, her lustrous auburn head outlined against the sombre-hued redwood of the wall behind her.

There was a little hush in the room after the tempest.

"No, that 's a fact, — that 's a fact. Well — then — you see — " continued Lysander, groping for his forgotten place in the recital. "Oh, yes, — I got up and told 'im 'Addyoce,' as if I s'posed he was through, and started off; an' he called me back, an' 'lowed mebbe the old folks did n't have much loose change lyin' 'round to put into water improvements; an' I told 'im I did n't know, — I reckoned you could mortgage the ranch. From the way he talked, he 'd make you a handsome loan on it, and jump at the chance; an' after he 'd hummed and hawed a while, he offered to give you a clear title to Flutterwheel Spring if you 'd deed 'im your int'rest in the rest o' the cañon. I told 'im it was n't my funeral. I 'd tell you what he said, an' you could do as you pleased."

The old woman fixed her small, shrewd eyes on her son-in-law.

"What else 'd he say, Lysander?"

"Nothin' much. Wanted me to use my influence with the old man!"

His mother-in-law gave a short, contemptuous sniff.

"I reckon he 'd like to do business with the old man. What 'd you tell 'im?"

"I told 'im I 'd be sure to put my influence where it 'd do the most good, an' I 'dvised him to see you. I 'lowed him an' you 'd git on peaceable as a meetin' to 'lect a preacher," — Lysander rubbed his gnarled hand over his face, as if to erase a lurking grin, — "but he did n't seem anxious."

"I reckon not. Is that all he said?"

"'Bout all. He said it was a damned good trade."

"Ly*san*der!" Mrs. Sproul sprang up, placing herself between her husband and the heap of slumbering innocents in the corner. "Ly*san*der Sproul, — and you a father! This comes of consortin' with the ungodly, and settin' in the chair of the scorner."

"Oh, come now, Minervy, I was only quotin'." Lysander's eye twinkled, but he spoke contritely, with generous considera-

tion for his wife's condition, which was imminently delicate.

"Oh, you 're hystericky, Minervy. You 'd best go to bed," observed her mother. "You 're all tuckered out with yer walk. I guess Lysander 's told all he knows, hain't you, Lysander?"

"'Bout all, — yes. He followed me out to the wagon, and hinted something about Poindexter wantin' help if he went to work on the tunnel, and 'lowed I 'd find it handier to have a job nearder home, now that the grape-haulin' was over. But I told 'im there was no trouble about that. The nearder home I got, the more work I found, gener'ly. Pay was kind o' short, but then a man must be a trifle stickin' that would n't do his own work fer nothin'."

Lysander got up and carried the baby into the adjoining room, bending his lank form from habit rather than from necessity, as he passed through the doorway.

Mrs. Sproul, tearfully resentful of the charge of hysterics, investigated the sleeping children with a view to more permanent disposal of them for the night, a process which resulted in much whimpering, and a

limp, somnolent sense of injury on the part of the investigated.

"I don't take much stock in Nate Forrester's trades," said the grandmother, elevating her voice so that Lysander could hear; "there 's some deviltry back of 'em, gener'ly; the better they look, the more I 'm afraid of 'em. I don't purtend to know what he 's drivin' at now, not bein' the prince o' darkness, but I reckon he can wait till I do."

II.

The next day Melissa turned her gray eyes with a vague, kindling interest toward the "volunteer barley-patch." Two or three points of white gleamed upon it in the afternoon sun. She mused upon them speculatively for awhile, and then consulted Lysander.

"I reckon it 's the survey stakes, M'lissy," he said kindly. "Forrester 's dividin' it up, as he said. I would n't say nothin' 'bout it to yer maw, 'f I was you; it 'll only rile her up."

Melissa looked at the field in a quiet, dispassionate way.

"The land 's his'n, ain't it, Lysander?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, the land 's his'n, an' a good part o' the cañon, too, — all but a little that b'longs to yer maw. But the hull thing used to be hern; quite a spell back, though."

Lysander was hauling stones from a knoll near the house, and dumping them on the edge of the cañon, — a leisurely process, carried on by means of a sled, of unmistakable home manufacture, drawn by one of the dun-colored mules. Melissa was helping him in a desultory, intermittent fashion. There was a very friendly understanding between these two peace-loving members of the family.

The young girl carried two or three speckled granite boulders and dropped them into the rude vehicle, and then sat down on the edge of it meditatively. The dark rim of her hat made a background for her head with its little billows of richly tinted hair. Exertion had brought a faint transitory pink to her fair, freckled face.

"Did Colonel Forrester steal the land and water from mother, Lysander?" she

asked, with the calm, unreasoning candor of youth.

Lysander straightened his lank form, and then betook himself to a seat on a neighboring boulder, evidently of the opinion that the judicial nature of the question before him demanded a sitting posture.

"I dunno about that, M'lissy," he said, shutting one eye and squinting across the valley sagaciously. "The *Soo*preme Court of the State of Californy said he did n't, an' yer maw says he did, — with regards to the cañon, that is. The land, — well, she deeded him the land, but he sort o' had the snap on her when she done it. You 'll find, M'lissy," he added, with a careful disavowal of prejudice, "that there 's as much difference of 'pinion about stealin' as there is about heaven."

There was a long, serene, comfortable silence. Even the mule seemed dreamily retrospective. Bees reveled in the honeyed wealth of the buckthorn, and chanted their content in drowsy monotony. The upland lavished its spicy sweetness on the still, yellow air. A gopher peered out of its freshly made burrow with quick, wary turns

of its little head, and dropped suddenly out of sight as Melissa spoke.

"How come mother to deed him the land, Sandy?"

The weight of decision being lifted from Lysander's shoulders, he got up and resumed his work, evidently esteeming a mild form of activity admissible in purely narrative discourse.

"Well, ye see, M'lissy, yer maw homestidded the land and filed a claim on the water in the cañon eight or ten years back, when neither of 'em was worth stealin'; an' she 'lowed she done the thing up in good shape, and had everything solid an' reg'lar, till Colonel Forrester come and bought the Santa Elena ranch and a lot o' dry land j'inin' it, and commenced nosin' around the cañon, an' hirin' men to overhaul the county record; an' the fust thing you know, he filed a claim onto the water in the cañon. Then you can guess what kind of a racket there was on hand."

Lysander paused, and sat down on a pile of stones, shaking his head in vague, reminiscent dismay. The young girl turned and looked at him, a sudden gleam of recollection widening her eyes.

"I b'lieve I remember 'bout that, Sandy," she said, with a little thrill of animation in her voice.

"Like enough. You was quite a chunk of a girl then. Minervy an' me was bee-ranchin' over t' the Verdugo, that spring. The rains was late and lodged yer maw's barley, so as 't she did n't have half a crop; an' you know yer paw 's kind o' — kind o' — easy,"— having chosen the adjective after some hesitation, Lysander lingered over it approvingly, — "and bein' as she was dead set on fightin' the Colonel, she mortgaged the ranch to raise the money for the law-suit."

Lysander stopped again. Memories of that stormy time appeared to crowd upon him bewilderingly. He shook his head in slow but emphatic denial of his ability to do them dramatic justice in recital.

There was another long silence. The noonday air seemed to pulsate, as if the mountain were sleeping in the sun and breathing regularly. The weeds, which the weight of the sled had crushed, gave out a fragrance of honey and tar. A pair of humming-birds darted into the stillness in a

little tempest of shrill-voiced contention, and the mule, aroused from dejected abstraction by the intruders, shook his tassel-like tail and yawned humanly.

Melissa got up and wandered toward the edge of the cañon, and Lysander, aroused from the plentitude of his recollections by her absence, completed his load and drove the dun-colored mule leisurely after her.

The stones fell over the precipice, breaking into the quiet of the depths below with a long, resounding crash that finally rippled off into silence, and the two sat down on the side of the empty sled and rode back to the stone-pile.

"I 've always thought," said Lysander, resuming his work and his narrative with equal deliberation, "that there was a good deal missed by yer maw bein' took down with inflammatory rheumatiz jest about the time o' the trial o' that lawsuit. I dunno as it would 'a' made much difference in the end, but it would 'a' made consider'ble as it went along, and I think she 'd 'a' rested easier if she 'd 'a' had her say. Of course they come up an' took down her testimony in writin'; but it was shorthand, an' yer

maw don't speak shorthand fer common. Well, of course, the old Colonel got away with the jury, and then yer maw found out that he 'd bought the mortgage ; an' about the time it was due he come up here, as smooth as butter, an' offered to give her this little patch o' boulders an' let her move the house onto it, an' give her share 'nough in the cañon to irrigate it, if she 'd deed him the rest o' the land, an' save him the trouble o' foreclosin'. So she done it. But I don't think he enj'yed his visit, all the same. She was n't sparin' o' her remarks to 'im, an' I think some o' 'em must 'a' hurt his feelin's, fer he hain't been here sence." Lysander chuckled with reminiscent relish.

Melissa had walked around the sled, and stood facing him, with her hands behind her. Her slight figure in its limp blue cotton drapery had the scarred mountain-side for a background.

"I don't see yet as he done anything so awful mean," she protested leniently.

"Ner do I, M'lissy," acquiesced her brother-in-law. "But after the hull thing was signed, sealed, and delivered,"— Lysander rested from his labors again on the

strength of these highly legal expressions, — "after it was closed up, so to speak, it came to yer maw's ears, in some way, that there was a mistake in the drawin' of that mortgage, an' this land was left out of it, an' would 'a' been hern anyway; and somehow that thing has stuck in her craw all these years, and sort o' soured her."

Melissa mused on the problem, wide-eyed and grave. The mule seemed to await her verdict with humble resignation. Lysander sat on the side of the sled and looked across the valley seaward, to where Catalina was outlined against the horizon in soft, cloud-like gray.

"An' it was a mistake? she meant to put it in the mortgage?" queried the girl.

"Yes, she meant to, so far as a person can be said to mean anything when they 're a-mortgagin' their homestead; usually they 're out o' their heads. But the law don't take no 'count o' that kind o' craziness. You can do the foolest things, M'lissy, without the court seein' a crack in your brain; but if you happen to get mad an' put a bullet through some good-fer-nothin' loafer, then immedjitly yer insane. That 's the law, M'lissy."

Melissa received this exposition of her country's code with wondering, luminous eyes. It had a wild, unreasonable sound which was a sufficient guarantee of its correctness. The doings of authorities were liable to be misty by reason of elevation. The fault lay in her limited vision.

"I s'pose the law 's right. An' the law said the cañon did n't belong to mother. I think that ought to 'a' settled it. I don't see any good in it all, — this talkin' so loud, an' scoldin', an' callin' people names. Do you, Sandy?"

"I hain't seen much good come of it," confessed the man reluctantly; "but it 's human to talk, — it 's human, M'lissy. Some folks find it relievin', an' it don't do any harm."

The young girl did not assent. Deep down in her placid, peace-loving nature was the obstinate conviction that it did a great deal of harm. She sat down in the velvety burr-clover, clasping her hands about her knees.

"Is Flutterwheel Spring more 'n mother's share o' the cañon?" she inquired.

"Yes, I think it is. Of course I never

measured the water, an' I did n't admit it when Forrester said so; but I 'd 'a' resked sayin' it was, if anybody else 'd asked me."

"Why would n't you say so to him?"

Lysander laughed, and flipped a pebble toward a gray squirrel, who gave a little rasping, insulted bark, and whisked into his hole in high dudgeon.

"Well, because he ain't a-lackin' for information, an' I hain't got none to spare, M'lissy."

The young girl rocked herself gently in the clover.

"I don't understand it," she said hopelessly. "It looks as if he was tryin' to be fair, an' mother would n't let him. I should think she 'd be glad, even if he did used to be mean, — an' I can't see as he was any meaner than the law 'lowed him to be. I s'pose the law 's right. You went to the war for the law, did n't you, Sandy?"

Her companion winced. There was one thing dearer to him than his neutrality in the family feud.

"Mebbe I did, M'lissy, — mebbe I did," he answered, with a trifling accession of dignity: "fer the law as I understood it.

The law 's all right, but it ain't every judge nor every jury that knows what it is; they think they do, but they 're liable to be mistaken. Seems to me they 're derned liable to be mistaken!" he added, with some asperity.

And so the paths that to Melissa's straightforward consciousness seemed so simple and direct ended, one and all, in hopeless confusion. Even Lysander had failed her. The foundations of human knowledge were certainly giving way when Lysander indulged in the mysterious.

Melissa turned and left him, walking absently up the little path that led to the cañon. She had not noticed a speck crawling like an overburdened insect along the winding road in the valley. Visible and invisible by turns, as the sage-brush was sparse or high, and emerging at last into permanent view where the wild growth came to an end and Mrs. Withrow's "patch" began, it resolved itself, to Lysander's intent and curious gaze, into a diminutive gray donkey, bearing a confused burden of blankets and cooking utensils, and followed by a figure more dejected, if possible, than the donkey himself.

"I'll be hanged if the old man hain't showed up!" said Lysander, dropping down on the sled, and throwing back into the pile two boulders he held, as if to indicate a general cessation of all logical sequence and a consequent embargo on industry.

Evidently the old man was conscious that he "showed up" to poor advantage, for he began prodding the donkey with a conscientious absorption that filled that small brute with amazement, and made him amble from one side of the road to the other, in a vain endeavor to look around his pack and discover the reason for this unexpected turn in the administration of affairs.

Lysander watched their approach with an expression of amused contempt. The traveler started, in a clumsy attempt at surprise, when he was opposite his son-in-law, and, giving the donkey a parting whack that sent him and his hardware onward at a literally rattling pace, turned from the road, and sidled doggedly through the tarweed toward the stone-pile.

Lysander folded his arms, and surveyed him in a cool, sidelong way that was peculiarly withering.

"Well," he said, with a caustic downward inflection, — "well, it 's you, is it?"

The newcomer admitted the gravity of the charge by an appealing droop of his whole person.

"Yes," he answered humbly, "it 's me, — an' I did n't want to come. I vum I did n't. But Forrester made me. He 'lowed you would n't hev no objections to my comin' — on business."

He braced himself on the last two words, and made a feeble effort to look his son-in-law in the face. What he saw there was not encouraging. It became audible in a sniff of undisguised contempt.

"Where 'd you see Forrester?"

"At the winery. Ye see I was a-goin' over to the Duarte, an' I stopped at the winery" —

"What 'd you stop at the winery fer?" interrupted the younger man savagely.

"Why, I tole ye, — Forrester wanted to see me *on business*. I stopped to see Forrester, Lysander. What else 'd I stop fer? I was in a big hurry, too, an' I vum I hated to stop, but I hed to. When a man like Forrester wants to see you" —

"How 'd you know he wanted to see you?" demanded Sproul.

The old man gave his questioner a look of maudlin surprise.

"Why, he tole me so hisself; how else 'd I find it out? I was a-settin' there in the winery on a kaig, an' he come an' tole me he wanted to see me *on business*. 'Pears to me you 're duller 'n common, Lysander." The speaker began to gather courage from his own ready comprehension of intricacies which evidently seemed to puzzle his son-in-law. "Why, sho, — yes, Lysander, don't ye see?" he added encouragingly.

"Oh, yes, I see, — I see," repeated Lysander sarcastically. "It 's as clear as mud. Now, look here," he added, turning upon his visitor sternly, "you let Forrester alone. You don't know any more about business than a hog does about holidays, an' you know it, an' Forrester knows it. You 'll put your foot in it, that 's what you 'll do."

The old man looked pensively at one foot and then at the other, as if speculating on the probable damage from such a catastrophe.

"I'm sure I dunno," he said plaintively. "Forrester 'peared to think I ought to come; he tole me why, but I vum I've fergot." He took off his hat and gazed into it searchingly, as if the idea that had mysteriously escaped from his brain might have lodged in the crown.

Lysander fell to work with an energy born of disgust for another's uselessness.

"Seein' I'm here, I reckon nobody 'll objeck to my payin' my respecks to the old woman," continued the newcomer, glancing from the crown of his hat to Lysander's impassive face with covert inquiry.

"I guess if you c'n stand it, the rest of us 'll have to," sneered his son-in-law. "I've advised you over 'n' over again to steer clear of the old woman; but there's no law agen a man courtin' his own wife, even if she don't give 'im much encouragement."

The old man put on his hat, and shuffled uneasily toward the house. Lysander stopped his work, and looked after him with a whimsical, irreverent grimace.

"You're a nice old customer, you are; an' Forrester's 'nother. I wish to the

livin' gracious the old woman 'd send you a-kitin'; but she won't; she 'll bark at you all day, but she won't bite. Women 's queer."

Mrs. Withrow was engaged in what she called "workin' the bread into the pans." She received her dejected spouse with a snort of disapproval.

"When the donkey come a-clatterin' up to the door, I knowed there was another follerin'," she said acridly. "Come in an' set down. I s'pose you 're tired: you mostly are."

The old man sidled sheepishly into the room and seated himself, and his wife turned her back upon him and fell to kneading vigorously a mass of dough that lay puffing and writhing on the floured end of a pine table.

"I jess come on Forrester's 'count," he began haltingly: "that is, he did n't want me to come, but I was n't goin' to do what Forrester said. I ain't a-carin' fer Forrester. I was n't goin' to take a trip 'way up here jess because he wanted me to, so I did n't. I" —

"Shut up!" said his wife savagely, without turning her head.

The visitor obeyed, evidently somewhat relieved to escape even thus ignominiously from the bog into which his loquacity was leading him.

The old woman thumped and pounded the mass of dough until the small tenement shook. Then, after much shaping and some crowding, she consigned her six rather corpulent loaves to "the pans," and turned on her nominal lord.

He had fallen asleep, with his head dropped forward on his breast: his hat had fallen off, and lay in his lap in a receptive attitude, as if expecting that the head would presently drop into it.

Mrs. Withrow gave him a withering glance.

"Forrester sent you, did 'e? You miser-'ble old jelly-fish! You 're a nice match fer Forrester, you are!"

She pushed her loaves angrily under the stove, to the discomfiture of the cat, who, being thus rudely disturbed, yawned and stretched, and curved its back to the limit of spinal flexibility, as it rubbed against the old woman's knees.

III.

The California winter had blossomed and faded. The blaze of the poppies on the mesa had given place to the soft, smoky tint of the sage, and almost insensibly the cloudless summer had come on.

Work had commenced in Sawpit Cañon. Unwillingly, and after much wrangling, the old woman had yielded to the evident fairness of Forrester's offer. Even in yielding, however, she had permitted herself the luxury of defiance, and had refused to appear before a notary in the valley to sign the deed. If it afforded her any satisfaction when that official was driven to the door by Colonel Forrester, and entered her kitchen, carrying his seal, and followed by an admiring and awestricken group of children, she did not display it by the faintest tremor of her grim countenance. She had held the end of the penholder gingerly while she made her "mark," and it was when old Withrow had been banished from the room, and the notary, in a bland, perfunctory way, had made her acquainted with the contents of the document, and inquired

whether she signed the same freely and voluntarily, that she deigned to speak.

"Did Nate Forrester tell you to ask me that?" she demanded, darting a quick glance through the open door at the Colonel, who sat in his road-wagon under the trailing pepper-tree, flicking the flies from his roadster's back. "Ef he did, you tell 'im fer me that the man don't live that kin make me do what I don't want to. An' ef he thinks the two or three kaigs of wine he 's poured into that poor, miser'ble, sozzlin' old man o' mine has had anything to do with me signin' this deed, he 's a bigger fool than I took 'im to be, an' that 's sayin' a good deal."

And with this ample though somewhat novel declaration of freedom from marital compulsion the notary was quite willing to consider the majesty of the law satisfied, and proceeded to affix his seal on its imposing star of gilded paper, a process which drew the children about him in a rapidly narrowing circle from which he was glad to escape.

"Damn it," he said, as he climbed into the road-wagon and tucked the robe about

his legs, — "damn it, Colonel, I thought you were popular with the gentler sex; but there certainly seems to be a coolness between you and the old lady," and the two men drove off, laughing as they went.

The document they had left behind them, which made Mrs. Withrow the owner of Flutterwheel Spring, "being the most southerly spring on the west side of Sawpit Cañon," had lain untouched upon the table until Lysander had taken it in charge, and it was this lofty indifference on the part of his mother-in-law that had justified her in the frequent boast that, "whatever she'd done, she had n't stirred out of her tracks, nohow."

So at last the stillness of Sawpit Cañon was invaded. Poindexter had come from San Gabriel Mission, and with him a young engineer from Los Angeles, — a straight, well-made young fellow, whose blue flannel shirt was not close enough at the collar to hide the line of white that betokened his recent escape from civilization. There were half a dozen workmen besides, and the muffled boom of blasting was heard all day among the boulders. At night, the touch

of a banjo and the sound of men's voices singing floated down from the camp among the sycamores.

This camp was a bewildering revelation to Melissa, who carried milk to the occupants every evening. The Chinese cook, who came to meet her and emptied her pail, trotting hither and thither, and swearing all the time with a cheerful confidence in the purity of his pigeon English, was not to her half so much a foreigner and an alien as was either of the two men who occupied the engineer's tent. They raised their hats when she appeared among the mottled trunks of the sycamores. One of them — the younger, no doubt — sprang to help her when her foot slipped in crossing the shallow stream, and the generous concern he manifested for her safety, and which was to him the merest commonplace of politeness, was to Melissa a glimpse into Paradise.

"By Jove, she 's pretty, Poindexter," he had said, as he came back and picked up his banjo; "she has eyes like a rabbit."

And Poindexter had added up two columns of figures and contemplated the result some time before he asked, "Who?"

"The milkmaid, — she of the bare feet and blue calico. I have explored the dim recesses of her sunbonnet, and am prepared to report upon the contents. The lass is comely."

But Poindexter had relapsed into mathematics, and grunted an unintelligible reply.

Melissa heard none of this. All that she heard was the faint, distant strum of a banjo, and a gay young voice announcing to the rocks and fastnesses of the cañon that his love was like a red, red rose. His love! Melissa walked along the path beside the flume in vague bewilderment. It was his love, then, whose picture she had seen pinned to the canvas of the tent. The lady was scantily attired, and Melissa had a confused idea that her heightened color might arise from this fact. She felt her own cheeks redden at the thought.

Lysander was at work in the cañon some distance below the new tunnel, "ditching" the water of Flutterwheel Spring to Mrs. Withrow's land.

"That long-legged tenderfoot thinks you're purty, M'lissy," he announced, as he smoked his pipe on the doorstep one

evening. "He come down to the ditch this afternoon to see if I could sharpen a pick fer 'em, and he asked if you was my little dotter. I told 'im no, I was your great-grandpap," and Lysander laughed teasingly."

Melissa was sitting on a low chair behind him, holding her newly arrived niece in her arms. She bent over the little puckered face, her own glowing with girlish delight. The baby stirred, and tightened its wrinkles threateningly, and Melissa stooped to kiss the little moist silken head.

"I — I don't even know his name," she faltered.

"Nor me, neither," said Lysander. "Poindexter calls him 'Sterling,' but I don' know if it 's his first name or his last. Anyway, he seems to be a powerful singer."

The baby broke into a faint but rapidly strengthening wail.

"Come, now, Pareppy Rosy," said Lysander soothingly, "don't you be jealous; your old pappy ain't a-goin' back on you as a musicianer. Give 'er to me, M'lissy."

Melissa laid the little warm, unhappy bundle in its father's arms, and stood in the

path in front of them, looking over the valley, until the baby's cries were hushed.

"Was the pick much dull?" she asked, with a faint stirring of womanly tact.

"Oh, yes," rejoined the unsuspecting Lysander; "they get 'em awful dull up there in the rock. I had to bring it down to the forge, an' I guess I 'll git you to take it back to 'em in the morning. I 've got through with the ditch, and I want to go to makin' basins; them orange-trees west o' the road needs irrigatin'."

"Yes, they 're awful dry; they 're curlin' a little," said the girl, with waning interest. "I thought mebbe Mr. Poindexter done the singin'?" she added, after a little silence.

Her brother-in-law hesitated, and then found his way back.

"No, I guess not; I s'pose he joins in now and then, but it 's the Easterner that leads off."

"Jee-*ee*-rusa*lem*, my happy home!"

Lysander threw his head back against the casement of the door, and broke into the evening stillness with his heavy, unmanage-

able bass. Mrs. Sproul came to the door to "take the baby in out of the night air;" the air indoors being presumably a remnant of midday which had been carefully preserved for the evening use of infants.

The next morning Melissa carried the pick to the workmen at the tunnel.

A fog had drifted in during the night, and was still tangled in the tops of the sycamores. The soft, humid air was sweet with the earthy scents of the cañon, and the curled fallen leaves of the live oaks along the flume path were golden-brown with moisture. Beads of mist fringed the silken fluffs of the clematis, dripping with gentle, rhythmical insistence from the trees overhead.

Melissa had set out at the head of a straggling procession, for the children had clamored to go with her.

"You can go 'long," she said, with placid good nature, "if you 'll set down when you give out, and not go taggin' on, makin' a fuss."

In consequence of this provision various major-generals had dropped out of the ranks, and were stationed at different points

in the rear, and only Melissa and Ulysses S. Grant were left. Even that unconquerable hero showed signs of weakening, lagging behind to "sick" his yellow cur into the wild-grape thickets in search of mountain lion and other equally ambitious game.

Melissa turned in the narrow path, and waited for him to overtake her.

"I b'lieve you 'd better wait here, 'Lyss," she said gravely. "You can go up the bank there and pick some tunas. Look out you don't get a cactus spine in your foot, though, for I hain't got anything to take it out with exceptin' the pick," — she smiled in the limp depths of her sunbonnet, — "an' I won't have that when I come back."

The dog, returned from the terrors of his unequal chase at the sound of Melissa's voice, looked and winked and wagged his approval, and the two comrades darted up the bank with mingled and highly similar yaps of release.

Melissa quickened her steps, following the path until she heard the sound of voices and the ring of tools in the depths below. Then she turned, and made her way through the underbrush down the bank.

Suddenly she heard a loud, prolonged whistle and the sound of hurrying feet. She stood still until the footsteps had died away. Then the sharp report of an explosion shook the ground beneath her feet, and huge pieces of rock came crashing through the trees about her. The girl gave a shrill, terrified scream, and fell cowering upon the ground. Almost before the echo had ceased, Sterling sprang through the chaparral, his face white and his lips set.

"My God, child, are you hurt?" he said, dropping on his knees beside her.

"No, I ain't hurt," she faltered, "but I was awful scared. I did n't know you was blastin' here; I thought it was on up at the tunnel."

"It was until this morning. We are going to put in a dam." He frowned upon her, unable to free himself from alarm. "I did not dream of any one being near. What brought you so far up the cañon?"

"I brung you the pick."

She stooped toward it, and two or three drops of blood trickled across her hand.

"You are hurt, see!" said Sterling anxiously.

The girl turned back her sleeve and showed a trifling wound.

"I must 'a' scratched it on the Spanish bayonet when I fell. It 's no difference. Nothin' struck me. Lysander 's gettin' ready to irrigate; he said if you wanted any more tools sharpened, I could fetch 'em down to the forge."

The young man showed a preoccupied indifference to her message. Producing a silk handkerchief, fabulously fine in Melissa's eyes, he bound up the injured wrist, with evident pride in his own deftness and skill.

"Are you quite sure you are able to walk now?" he asked kindly.

"Why, I ain't hurt a bit; not a speck," reiterated the girl, her eyes widening.

Her companion's face relaxed into the suggestion of a smile. He helped her up the bank, making way for her in the chaparral, and tearing away the tangled ropes of the wild-grape vines.

"Tell your father not to send you above the camp again," he said gently, when she was safe in the path; "one of the men will go down with the tools."

Melissa stood beside the flume a moment, irresolute. Her sunbonnet had fallen back a little, disclosing her rustic prettiness.

"I 'm much obliged to you," she said quaintly, exhausting her knowledge of the amenities. "I 'll send the hankecher back as soon as I can git it washed and done up."

The young man smiled graciously, bowed, raised his hat, and waited until she turned to go; then he bounded down the bank, crashing his way through the underbrush with the pick.

None of the men below had heard the cry, and Poindexter refused to lash himself into any retrospective excitement.

"Confound the girl!" fumed Sterling, vexed, after the manner of men, over the smallest waste of emotion; "why must she frighten a fellow limp by screaming when she was n't hurt?"

"Possibly for the same reason that the fellow became limp before he knew she *was* hurt," suggested Poindexter; "or she may have thought it an eminently ladylike thing to do; she looks like a designing creature. If the killed and wounded are properly

cared for, suppose we examine the result of the blast."

IV.

It was Saturday morning, and Lysander and Melissa were irrigating the orange-trees. Old Withrow sat by the ditch at the corner of the orchard, watching them with a feeble display of interest, while two or three of the children climbed and tumbled over him as if he were some inoffensive domestic animal.

The old man had hung about the place longer than was his wont, filled with a maudlin glee over his own importance as having been in some way instrumental in the trade with Forrester; and he had followed Lysander to the orchard this morning with a confused alcoholic idea that he ought to be present when the water from Flutter-wheel Spring was turned on for the first time.

"You 'll git a big head," he had said to his wife, as he started, — "a deal bigger head 'n ever. I tole Forrester I 'd tell ye it was a good trade, an' I done what I said I 'd do. Forrester knowed what he was doin' when he got me" —

"G'long, you old gump!" his spouse had hurled at him wrathfully, ceasing from a vigorous wringing of the mop to grasp the handle with a gesture that was not entirely suggestive of industry.

The old man had put up his hand and wriggled in between Melissa and Lysander with a cur-like movement that brought a grim smile to his son-in-law's face, and made Melissa shrink away from him noticeably. Out in the orchard, however, he ceased to trouble them, being content to smoke and doze by the ditch, while the water ran in a gentle, eddying current from one basin to another, guided now and then by Lysander's hoe.

The boom of the blasting could be heard up the cañon, fainter as the afternoon seabreeze arose, and Melissa, standing barefoot in the warm, sandy soil, let the water swirl about her ankles as she mended the basins, and thought of the tall young surveyor who had bound up her wounded arm.

"I 'm a-goin' to take his hankecher to him to-morruh. Bein' it 's Sunday they won't be blastin'."

She leaned on her hoe and looked up the

cañon, where the blue of the distant mountains showed soft and smoky among the branches of the sycamores.

"M'lissy!" Lysander called from the lower end of the row of orange-trees, "hain't the ditch broke som'ers, or the water got into a gopher-hole? There ain't no head to speak of."

The girl turned quickly and looked about her. The water had settled into the loose soil of the basins, and was no longer running in the furrow. She walked across, following the main ditch to the edge of the cañon, looking anxiously for the break. The wet sand rippled and glistened in the bottom of the ditch, but no water was to be seen. Lysander, tired of waiting, came striding through the tarweed, with his hoe on his shoulder.

"I guess it 's broke furder on up the cañon, Sandy."

Melissa stepped back, as she spoke, to let him precede her on the narrow path, and the two walked silently beside the empty ditch. Lysander's face gathered gloom as they went.

"It 's some deviltry, I'll bet!" he broke

out, after a while. "Danged if I don't begin to think yer maw 's right!"

Melissa did not ask in what her mother was vindicated; she had a dull prescience of trouble. Things seemed generally to end in that way. She turned to her poor hopeless little dream again, and kept close behind Lysander's lank form all the way to Flutterwheel Spring.

Alas! not to Flutterwheel Spring. Where the spray had whirled in a fantastic spiral the day before, the moss was still wet, and the ferns waved in happy unconsciousness of their loss; but the stream that had flung itself from one narrow shelf of rock to another, in mad haste to join the rush and roar of Sawpit Cañon, had utterly disappeared.

Lysander turned to his companion, his face ashen-gray under the week-old stubble of his beard. Neither of them spoke. The calamity lay too near the source of things for bluster, even if Lysander had been capable of bluster. In swift dual vision they saw the same cruel picture: the shriveling orange-trees, the blighted harvest of figs dropping withered from the trees, the flume

dry and useless, the horse-trough empty and warping in the sun, — all the barren hopelessness of a mountain claim without water, familiar to both. And through it all Melissa felt rather than imagined the bitterness of her mother's wrath. Perhaps it was this latter rather than the real catastrophe that whitened the poor young face, turned toward Lysander in helpless dismay.

"Danged if I don't hate the job o' tellin' yer maw," said the man at last, raking the dry boulders with his hoe aimlessly, — "danged if I don't. I can't figger out who 's done it, but one thing 's certain, — it beats the devil."

Lysander made the last statement soberly, as if this vindication of his satanic majesty were a simple act of justice. Seeming to consider the phenomenon explained by a free confession of his own ignorance, he ceased his investigation, and sat down on the edge of the ditch hopelessly.

"Don't le' 's tell mother right away, Sandy. Paw 's fell asleep, an' he 'll think you turned the water off. Mebbe if we wait it 'll begin to run again." The hopefulness of youth crept into Melissa's quivering voice.

Lysander shook his head dismally.

"I 'm willin' enough to hold off, M'lissy, but I hain't got much hope. There ain't any Moses around here developin' water, that I know of. The meracle business seems to have got into the wrong hands this time; danged if it hain't. It gets away with me how Forrester can dry up a spring at long range that-a-way; there ain't a track in the mud around here bigger 'n a linnet's, — not a track. It 's pure deviltry, you can bet on that." Lysander fell back on the devil with restful inconsistency, and fanned himself with his straw hat, curled by much similar usage into fantastic shapelessness.

"I don't believe he done it," said Melissa, obstinately charitable. "I don't believe anybody done it. I believe it just happened. I don't think folks like them care about folks like us at all, or want to pester us. I believe they just play on things and sing," — the color mounted to her face, until the freckles were drowned in the red flood, — "an' laugh, an' talk, an' act pullite, an' that 's all. I don't believe Colonel Forrester hates mother like she thinks he does at all. I think he just don't care!"

It was the longest speech Melissa had ever made. Her listener seemed a trifle impressed by it. He rubbed his hair the wrong way, and distorted his face into a purely muscular grin, as he reflected.

"I 've a mind to go and see Poindexter," Lysander announced presently. "Poindexter 's a smart man, and I b'lieve he 's a square man. 'T enny rate, it can't do any good to keep it a secret. Folks 'll find it out sooner or later. You stay here a minute, M'lissy, and I 'll go on up the cañon."

The young girl seated herself, with her back against a ledge of rocks, and her bare feet straight out before her. She was used to waiting for Lysander. Their companionship antedated everything else in Melissa's memory, and she early became aware that Lysander's "minutes" were fractions of time with great possibilities in the way of physical comfort hidden in the depths of their hazy indefiniteness.

She took off her corded sunbonnet, and crossed her hands upon it in her lap. The shifting sunlight that fell upon her through the moving leaves of the sycamores lent a grace to the angularity of her attitude. She

closed her eyes and listened drearily to the sounds of the cañon. The water fretting its way among the boulders below, the desultory gossip of the moving leaves, the shrill, iterative chirp of a squirrel scolding insistently from a neighboring cliff, — all these were familiar sounds to Melissa, and had often brought her relief from the rasping discomfort of family contention; but to-day she refused to be comforted. She had the California mountaineer's worship of water, and the gurgle of the stream among the sycamores filled her with vague rebellion.

"Why could n't he 'a' let us alone?" she mused resentfully. "As long as he had a share o' the spring it did n't show any signs o' dryin' up. Mother never said nothin' about Flutterwheel to him; it was all his doin's. But it 's no use." She dropped her hands at her sides with a little gesture of despair. "He never done it, but mother 'll always think so. She does hate him so — so — *pizenous*."

There was a sound of approaching footsteps, and the girl scrambled to her feet. It was not Lysander coming at that business-like pace. Sterling, hurrying along the path,

became conscious of her standing there, in the rigid awkwardness of unculture, and touched his hat lightly.

"Your father says the spring has stopped flowing," he said, pushing aside the ferns where the rocks were yet slimy and moss-grown. "It is certainly very strange."

"Yes, sir," faltered the girl, rubbing the sole of one foot on the instep of the other. "But Lysander ain't my father; he 's my brother-'n-law; he merried my sister."

"I beg your pardon," returned the young man absently, running his eye along the stratum of rock in the ledge above them. "I believe he did tell me he was not your father."

No one had ever begged Melissa's pardon before. She meditated a while as to the propriety of saying, "You 're welcome," but gave it up, wondering a little that polite society had made no provision for such an emergency, and stood in awkward silence, tying and untying her bonnet-strings.

Sterling pursued his investigations in entire forgetfulness of her presence, until Poindexter appeared in the path. Lysander followed, managing, by length of stride,

to keep up with the engineer's brisk movements.

There was much animated talk among the three men, which Melissa made no attempt to follow. The two engineers smiled leniently at Lysander's theory concerning Forrester, and fell into a discussion involving terms which were incomprehensible to both their hearers. All that Melissa did understand was the frank kindliness of the younger man's manner, and his evident desire to allay their fears. Colonel Forrester, he assured Lysander, was the kindest-hearted man in the world, — a piece of information which seemed to carry more surprise than comfort to its recipient. He would make it all right as soon as he knew of it, and they would go down and see him at once; that is, Mr. Poindexter would go, and he turned to Poindexter, who said, with quite as much kindliness, but a good deal less fervor, that he was going down to Santa Elena that evening to see the Colonel, and would mention the matter to him.

"Don't worry yourself, Sproul," he added guardedly. "If we find out that the work in the cañon has affected the spring, I think it will be all right."

"I reckon you won't be back before Monday?" said Lysander, with interrogative ruefulness.

"Well, hardly; but that is n't very long."

"Folks can git purty dry in two days, 'specially temperance folks, and some of our fam'ly 'll need somethin' to wet their whistles, for there 'll be a good deal o' talkin' done on the ranch between this and Monday, if the water gives out." Lysander turned his back on Melissa, who was pressing her bare foot in the soft wet earth at the bottom of the ditch, and made an eloquent facial addition to his remarks, for the benefit of the two men.

Sterling looked mystified, but his companion laughed.

"Oh, is that it? Well, turn some water from the sand-box into the old flume and run it down to your new ditch until I get back. I presume the ownership won't affect the taste. It is n't necessary to say anything about it; that is, unless you think best." He looked toward Melissa doubtfully.

"M'lissy won't blab," returned her brother-in-law laconically.

The young girl blushed, in the security of her sunbonnet, at the attention which this delicately turned compliment drew upon her, and continued to make intaglios of her bare toes in the mud of the ditch.

It occurred to Sterling for the first time that she might represent a personality. He went around the other two men, who had fallen into some talk about the flume, and stood in the path beside her.

"I have not seen you since you were up the cañon," he said kindly. "I hope your arm did not pain you."

Melissa shook her head without looking up.

"It was only a scratch; it did n't even swell up. I never said nothin' about it," she added in a lower tone.

The young man entered into the situation with easy social grace, and lowered his own voice.

"You didn't want to alarm your mother"—

"M'lissy," interrupted Lysander, "I guess I 'll go on up to the sand-box with Mr. Poindexter and turn on some water. I wish you 'd go 'long down to the orchard and

look after the basins till I git back. I won't be gone but a minute."

Sterling lifted his hat with a winsome smile that seemed to illuminate the twilight of poor Melissa's wilted sunbonnet, and the three men started up the cañon, the bay that they pushed aside on the path sending back a sweet, spicy fragrance.

Melissa shouldered her hoe and proceeded homeward.

"He does act awful pullite," she mused, "an' he had on a ring: I did n't know men folks ever wore rings. I wish I had n't 'a' been barefooted."

Poor Melissa! Sterling remembered nothing at all about her except a certain unconsciously graceful turn she had given her brown ankle as she stood pressing her bare foot in the sand.

## V.

On Sunday morning the Withrow establishment wore that air of inactivity which seems in some households intended to express a mild form of piety. Mother Withrow, it is true, had not yielded to the general weakness, and stood at the kitchen

table scraping the frying-pan in a resounding way that might have interfered with the matin hymn of a weaker-lunged man than Lysander. That stentorian musician seemed rather to enjoy it, as giving him something definite to overcome vocally, and roared forth his determination to "gather at the river" from the porch, where he sat with his splint-bottomed chair tipped back, and his eyes closed in a seeming ecstasy of religious fervor.

Old Withrow sat on the step, with his chin in his hands, smoking, and two dove-colored hounds stood, in mantel-ornament attitude, before him, looking up with that vaguely expectant air which even a long life of disappointment fails to erase from the canine countenance. Five or six half-clad chickens, huddling together in the first strangeness of maternal desertion, were drinking from an Indian mortar under the hydrant, and mother Withrow, coming to the door to empty her dish-pan, stood a moment looking at them.

"That there hydrant 's quit drippin' again," she said gruffly, turning toward the old man. "Them young ones turned it on

to get a drink, and then turned it clear off. 'Pears to me they drink most o' the time. I 'd think they come by it honestly, if 't wuz n't water. If you ain't too tired holdin' your head up with both hands, s'posin' you stir your stumps and turn it on a drop fer them chickens."

The old man got up with confused, vinous alacrity and started toward the hydrant.

"There 's no need o' savin' water on this ranch," he blustered feebly, "I kin tell you that. You 'd ought to go up to the spring and see what a good trade you made. I 'm a-goin' myself by 'n' by. I knowed" —

He broke off abruptly, as the old woman threw the dish-water dangerously near him.

"If water 's so plenty, some folks had ought to soak their heads," she retorted, disappearing through the door.

The old man regulated the hydrant somewhat unsteadily, and returned to a seat on the porch. Lysander's musical efforts had subsided to a not very exultant hum at the first mention of the water supply. Evidently his reflections on that subject were not conducive to religious enthusiasm.

Old Withrow assumed a confidential attitude and touched his son-in-law on the knee.

"She 's always so full of her prejudisms," he said, pointing toward the kitchen door with his thumb. "Now 'f she 'd go 'long o' me up to the spring and see what a tremenjus flow o' water there is, she 'd be pleased as Punch. Now would n't she?"

Lysander brought his chair to the floor with a bang that made the loose boards of the porch rattle.

"Come 'round the house, pap," he said anxiously.

The hounds followed, dejected, but hopeful, as became believers in special providence.

When the two men were out of hearing of the kitchen, Lysander took his father-in-law by the shoulders and shook him, as if by shaking down the loose contents of his brain he might make room for an idea.

"You want to shut up about the spring. It 's give out, — dried up. The blastin' and diggin' in the cañon done it, I s'pose, an' Poindexter — that 's the engineer — thinks Forrester 'll make it all right; but

you don't want to be coaxin' the old woman up there, not if the court knows herself, and you want to keep your mouth purty generally shut. D' y' understand?"

The old man's face worked in a feeble effort at comprehension.

"Give out, — dried up? Oh, come now, Lysander," he faltered.

"Yes, dried up, and you want to do the same. Don't you think this 'ud be a purty good time fer you to take a trip off somer's fer your health, pap?"

The old man stood a moment wrestling with the hopelessness of the situation. Besotted as he was, he could still realize the calamity that had overtaken them: could realize it without the slightest ability to suggest a remedy. As the direfulness of it all crept over him, something very like anger gleamed through the blear of his faded eyes.

"I'm a-goin' to see," he muttered sullenly, turning toward the cañon. "Damn their blastin'! Forrester said it was a good trade. He 'd ought to know."

A little later, Melissa started on her much dreamed of visit to the camp. She

had on her shoes now, and a comfortable sense of the propriety of her appearance induced by this fact, and an excess of starch in the skirt of her pink calico dress, brought a little flush of expectation to her cheek. She had even looked longingly at her best hat in its glory of green and purple millinery, and nothing but the absence of any excuse to offer her mother and sister for such lavish personal adornment had saved her from this final touch to the pathetic discord of her attire.

The silk handkerchief was in her pocket, properly "done up" and wrapped in a bit of newspaper, and she had rehearsed her part in the dialogue that a flattered imagination assured her must ensue upon its presentation until she felt it hardly possible that she could blunder.

"Somehow you don't feel so bashful when you 're all dressed up," she reflected, contemplating the angular obtrusiveness of her drapery with the satisfaction that fills the soul of the average *débutante*. "You feel so kind o' sheepish when you 're barefooted and your dress is all slimpsy."

Poor Melissa! how could she know that

yesterday, in all the limp forlornness that had made her hang her head when Sterling spoke to her, she had been a part of the beauty of the cañon, while to-day, in all her pink and rigid glory, she was a garish spot of discordant color in the landscape? How, indeed, do any of us know that we are not at our worst in our most triumphant moments?

The camp was well-nigh deserted, that morning. Poindexter had gone to Santa Elena to consult his employer, and most of the workmen had preferred the convivial joys of the Mexican saloon at San Gabriel to the stillness of the cañon. Sterling had written a few letters after breakfast, and then, taking his rifle from the rack, sauntered along the little path that led from the camp to the tunnel. The Chinese cook was dexterously slipping the feathers from a clammy fowl at the door of the kitchen tent.

"Hello, John," the young man called cheerfully. "What for you cook chicken? I go catchee venison for dinner."

The Chinaman smiled indulgently. Evidently the deer hunts of the past had not been brilliantly successful.

"I fly one lit' chicken," he said composedly. "He no velly big. By 'm by you bling labbit, I fly him too."

"Rabbit!" laughed back the hunter contemptuously, breaking his rifle and peering into the breech to see that it was loaded. "I 'll not waste a cartridge on a rabbit, John."

He lapsed from pigeon English with an ease that betokened a new-comer. The Chinaman looked after him pensively.

"Mist' Stellin' heap velly nice man," he said, with gentle condescension; "all same he *no sabe* shoot. By 'm by he come home, he heap likee my littie flied looster."

He held his "little rooster" rigidly erect by its elongated legs, and patiently picked the pin-feathers from its back. He had finished this process, and, suspending it by one wing in an attitude of patient suffering, was singeing it with a blazing paper, when Melissa appeared.

"What you want, gell?" he demanded autocratically, noticing that she carried no pail.

"Where is the young man, — the tall one?" asked Melissa.

"Young man? Mist' Stellin'? He take 'im gun an' go catchee labbit."

He waved his torch in the direction of the path, and then dropped it on the ground and stamped it out with his queerly shod foot.

Melissa hesitated a moment. She could not risk the precious handkerchief in the hands of the cook. No one else was visible. Two or three workmen were sleeping in the large tent under the wild grapevine. She could hear them breathing in loud nasal discord. It was better to go on up the cañon, she persuaded herself with transparent logic.

"It 's purty hard walkin' when you 've got your shoes on," she said, justifying her course by its difficulties, with the touch of Puritanism that makes the whole theological world kin, "but if I give it to him myself I 'll know he 's got it."

She glanced in at the door of the engineer's tent, as she passed. The banjo was there, a point of dazzling light to her eyes, but otherwise the disorder was far from elegant; resulting chiefly from that reckless prodigality in head and foot gear which seems to be a phase of masculine culture.

"I don't see what they want of so many hats and shoes," commented Melissa. "I sh'd think they could go barefooted sometimes, to rest their feet; an' I did n't know folks' heads ever got tired." The thought recalled her own disappointment in the matter of millinery. She put her hand up to the broken rim of her hat. "I 've a notion to take it off when I ketch up to him," she soliloquized. "I would if my hair was n't so awful red."

Old Withrow had preceded his daughter, stumbling along the flume path, muttering sullenly. All his groundless elation had suddenly turned to equally groundless wrath. Having allied himself in a stupid, servile way with Forrester, he clung to the alliance and its feeble reflected glory with all the tenacity of ignorance. There were not many connected links of cause and effect in the old man's muddled brain, but the value of water, for irrigating purposes only, had a firm lodgment there, along with the advantages to be derived from friendliness with the owner of a winery. There stirred in him a groveling desire to exonerate Forrester.

"They 're blastin', be they? Forrester never said nothin' 'bout blastin'. He 'll give it to 'em when he knows it. He 'll blast 'em!"

He staggered on past the cut-off that led to the camp, keeping well up on the bank along the path beside the ditch that Lysander had dug from Flutterwheel Spring. Once there, the sight of the ruin that had befallen his plans seemed to strike him dumb for a little. The slime still clung to the rocks, and a faint trickle of water oozed into the pool. He sat down a moment, mumbling sullen curses, and then staggered to his feet and wandered aimlessly up the cañon.

Sterling had idled along, crossing and recrossing the restless stream that appeared to be hurrying away from the quiet of the mountains. He was really not a very enthusiastic hunter, as the Chinaman had discovered. He liked the faint, sickening odor of the brakes and the honey-like scent of the wild immortelles that came in little warm gusts from the cliffs above far better than the smell of powder. He stopped where the men had been at work the day before,

and looked about with that impartial criticism that always seems easier when nothing is being done.

Some idea must have suggested itself suddenly, for he hurried across to the opening of the tunnel and went in, leaving his rifle beside the entrance. When he turned to come out, he heard a sound of muttered curses, and in another instant he was confronted by the barrel of a gun in the hands of a man he had never seen, — a man with wandering, bloodshot eyes, which the change from the half-light of the tunnel's mouth magnified into those of an angry beast.

"You 've been a-blastin', have ye, an' a-dryin' up other folks's springs? Damn ye, I 'll blast ye!"

The old man was striving in vain to hold the rifle steadily, and fumbling with the lock. Sterling did not stop to note that the weapon was his own, and might easily be thrust aside. He did what most young men would have done — drew his revolver from his pocket and fired.

The report echoed up and down the cañon. By the time it died away life had changed for the younger man. Old Withrow had

fallen forward, still clutching the rifle, and was dead.

Melissa, standing among the sycamores below, had seen it all as a sudden, paralyzing vision. She stood still a brief, terrified instant, and then turned and ran down the cañon, keeping in the bed of the stream, and climbing over the boulders.

She was conscious of nothing but a wild dismay that she had seen it. She had a vague hope that she might run away from her own knowledge. The swift, unreasoning notion had lodged itself in her brain that it would be better if no one knew what had happened. Perhaps no one else need be told. She avoided the camp, scrambling through the chaparral on the opposite bank, and, reaching the flume path at last, hurried on breathlessly.

Suddenly Melissa stopped. It would not do to approach the house in that way. She must rest a little and cool her flushed face before any one should see her. She leaned against the timbers that supported the flume across the gully, and fanned herself with her hat. The tumult of her brain had not shaped itself into any plan. She only

wished she had not seen. It was such a dreadful thing to know, to tell. Insensibly she was preparing herself to dissemble. She was cooling her cheeks, and getting ready to saunter lazily toward the house and speak indifferently. She did not realize that after that she could not tell. There would be an instant in which to decide, and then a dreary stretch of dissimulation.

At this moment she heard the quick hoof-beats of a galloping horse on the road that led down the mountain-side. He was going away! Then certainly she must not speak. They would never find him, and she would keep the secret forever. She listened until the hoof-beats died away. The flush faded out of her poor little face, leaving it wan and hopeless. After all, it was a dreary thing for him to ride away, and leave her nothing but a dismal secret such as this. A shred of cloud drifted across the sun, and the cañon suddenly became a cold, cheerless place. She stepped into the path, and came face to face with Lysander.

"Have yuh seen anything of yer paw, M'lissy? Why, what ails yuh, child? Y'r as white as buttermilk. Has anything bit yuh?"

"No," faltered the girl, looking down at her wretched finery; "my shoes 'a' been a-hurtin' my feet. I'm goin' back to the house to take 'em off. I'm tired."

"I wish y'd set right down here and take off y'r shoes, M'lissy," said her brother-in-law anxiously. "We'll have to kind o' watch yer paw. I had to tell 'im about the spring, an' he struck off right away an' said he was goin' up there. I reckoned he'd go away an' furgit it, but he hain't come back yit. I'm afraid he'll git to talkin' when he comes back to the house, and tell yer maw. It won't do no good, an' there ain't no use in her workin' herself up redheaded about it, — 't enny rate not till Poindexter comes back. We must git hold o' yer paw before he gits to see her, and brace 'im up ag'in. If you'll set here an' call to me if you see 'im below, I'll go on up an' look fer 'im."

Melissa had stood quite still, looking down at the uncompromising lines of her drapery. It was rapidly becoming a pink blur to her gaze. The ghastliness of what she had undertaken to conceal came over her like a chill, insweeping fog. She

shivered as she spoke, trying in vain to return Lysander's honest gaze.

"I 'll come back an' set here when I 've took off my shoes. You kin go on. I 'll come in a minute."

Lysander looked into her face an instant as he started.

"The seam o' yer stockin' 's got over the j'int, M'lissy," he said kindly; "it 's made you sick at yer stummick; y'r as white as taller."

VI.

Old Withrow entered his own house with dignity at last.

Strangely enough, when the spiritual and presumably the better part of us is gone, the world stands in awe of what remains. If the bleared eyes could have opened once more, and the dead man could have known that it was for fear of him the children were gathered in a whispering, awestricken group at the window, that respect for him caused the lowering of voices and baring of heads on the part of the household and curious neighbors, he would suddenly have found the world he had left a stranger place than any world to come.

There was no great pretense of grief. Mother Withrow looked at the dead face a while, supporting her elbow with one knotted hand, and grasping her weather-beaten jaw with the other. Perhaps her silence would have been the strangest feature of it all to him, if he could have known. If the years hid any romance that had been theirs, and was now hers, the old woman's face told no more of it than the flinty outside of a boulder tells of the leaf traced within.

"He wuz n't no great shakes of a man," she said to Minerva, "but I don't 'low to have him stood up an' shot at by any o' Nate Forrester's crowd without puttin' the law on the man that done it."

Lysander's attempt at concealment had melted away in the heat of the excitement occasioned by the murder. The drying up of the spring had been no secret in camp. The men who had carried Withrow's body to the house had talked of it unrebuked. Mother Withrow had heard them with a tightening of the muscles of her face and an increased angularity in her tall figure, but she had proudly refrained from the faintest manifestation of surprise. Nor had she

asked any questions of Minerva or Lysander. This unexpected reserve had been a great relief to the latter, who found himself not only released from an unpleasant duty, but saved from any reproaches for concealment.

The coroner had come up from Los Angeles, and there had been an inquest. Sterling had not been present, having ridden to Los Angeles to give himself up; but the men to whom he had told the story when he came to the camp had testified, and there had been a verdict that deceased came to his death from a wound made by a revolver in the hands of Frederick Sterling.

Some of the jury still hung about the place with cumbrous attempts at helpfulness, and Minerva moved tearfully to and fro in the kitchen, wearing her husband's hat with a reckless assumption of masculine rights and feminine privileges, while she set out a "bite of something" for the coroner, who must ride back to Los Angeles in hot haste.

Ulysses had denied himself the unwonted pleasure of listening longer to the men's whispered talk, to follow the stranger into the kitchen and watch him eat; his curiosity concerning the habits of that dignitary be-

ing considerably heightened by the official's haste, which pointed strongly to a rapid succession of murders requiring his personal attention, and marking him as a man of dark and bloody knowledge.

The hounds shared the boy's curiosity, and stood beside the table waving their scroll-like tails, and watching with expectant eagerness the unerring precision with which the stranger conveyed a knife-load of "frijoles" from his plate to his mouth. When he had finished his repast, gulping the last half-glass of buttermilk, and wiping the white beads from his overhanging mustache with quick horizontal sweeps of his gayly bordered handkerchief, he leaned back and flipped a bean at Ulysses, whose expression of intent and curious awe changed instantly to the most sheepish self-consciousness. The familiarity loosened his tongue, however, and he asked, with a little explosive gasp, —

"Do yuh think they 'll ketch 'im?"

"Ketch who?"

"The man that shot gran'pap."

"They 've got 'im now."

"Hev they? How 'd they ketch 'im?"

"He gave himself up."

"Will they hang 'im?"

The coroner's eyes twinkled.

"Don't you think they 'd ought to?"

"You bet!" Ulysses wagged his head with bloodthirsty vehemence.

The great man got up, laughing, and went toward the door, rubbing the boy's hair the wrong way as he passed him. The hounds followed languidly, and Ulysses darted up the creaking staircase, and tumbled into the little attic room where Melissa sat gazing drearily out of the window.

"They 've got 'im!" he said breathlessly. "They 're a-go'n' to hang 'im!"

The girl got up and backed toward the wall, gasping and dizzy.

"Who said so?" she faltered.

"The man downstairs, — the one that came from Loss Anglus."

Melissa put the palms of her outstretched hands against the wall behind her to steady herself. In the half-light she seemed crowding away from some terror that confronted her.

"I don't believe it. They won't do anything to him right away; it would n't be

fair. They don't know what paw done. I"—

Her voice broke. She looked about piteously, biting her lip and trying to remember what she had said.

Ulysses was not a critical listener. He had enjoyed his little sensation, and was ready for another. From the talk downstairs he knew that Sterling had acknowledged the killing to the men at the camp. His excitement made him indifferent as to the source of Melissa's information.

"I 'm go'n' to the hangin'," he said, doggedly boastful.

Melissa looked at him vacantly.

"How 'd they find out who done it?" she asked, dropping her hands and turning toward the window.

"He told it hisself,—blabbed it right out to the men at the camp; then he went on down to Loss Anglus, big as life, an' blowed about it there. He 's cheeky."

Melissa turned on him with a flash of contempt.

"You said they ketched him."

The boy felt his importance as the bearer of sensational tidings ebbing away.

"I don't care," he replied sullenly. "They 'll hang 'im, anyway: the cor'ner said so."

He clutched his throat with his thumbs and forefingers, thrusting out his tongue and rolling his eyes in blood-curdling pantomime.

His companion turned away drearily. The boy's first words had called up a vaguely outlined picture of flight, pursuit, and capture, possibly violence. This faded away, leaving her brain numb under its burden of uncertainty and deceit. She had an aching consciousness of her own ignorance. Others knew what might happen to him, but she must not even ask. She shrank in terror from what her curiosity might betray. She must stand idly by and wait. Perhaps Lysander would know; if she could ask any one, she could ask Lysander. There had sprung up in her mind a shadowy, half-formed doubt concerning the wisdom of her silence. He had told it himself, Ulysses had said; and this had chilled the little glow at her heart that came from a sense of their common secret. If she could only see him and ask what he would

have her do; but that was impossible. Perhaps, if he knew she had seen it, he might say she must tell, even if — even if — She gave a little moan, and leaned her forehead against the sash. Below she could hear the subdued voices of the men, and the creaking of the kitchen floor as Minerva walked to and fro, putting away the remnants of the coroner's repast. Already the children were beginning to recover from their awestricken silence, and Melissa could see them darting in and out among the fig-trees, firing pantomimic revolvers at each other with loud vocal explosions.

The gap that the old man's death had made in the household was very slight indeed; not half the calamity that the drying up of the spring had been. Melissa acknowledged this to herself with the candor peculiar to the very wise and the very ignorant, who alone seem daring enough to look at things as they are.

"They had n't ought to do anything to 'im; it ain't fair," she said to herself stoutly; "an' he just stood up an' told on hisself because he knowed he had n't done anything bad. I sh'd think they 'd be

ashamed of themselves to do anything to 'im after that."

"M'lissy!" Mrs. Sproul called from the foot of the stairs, her voice dying away in a prolonged sniffle. "I wish 't you 'd come down and help Lysander hook up the team. He 's got to go down t' the Mission, and it 'll be 'way into the night before he gets back."

The girl stood still a moment, biting her lip, and then hurried across the floor and down the staircase as if pursued. Minerva had left the kitchen, and there was no one to notice her unusual haste. Out at the barn, Lysander, almost disabled by the accession of a stiff white shirt and collar, was perspiring heavily in his haste to harness the mules.

"Minervy 's got 'er heart set on havin' the Odd Fellers conduct the funer'l," he said apologetically. "Strikes me kind o' onnecessary, but 't won't do no harm, I s'pose. She says yer paw was an Odd Feller 'way back, but he ain't kep' it up. I dunno if they 'll bury 'im or not."

The girl listened to him absently, straightening the mule's long ear which was caught

in the headstall, and fastening the buckles of the harness. Her face was hidden by her drooping sunbonnet, and Lysander could not see its pinched, quivering whiteness. They led the mules out of the stable and backed them toward the wagon standing under a live oak. Melissa bent over to fasten the tugs, and asked in a voice steadied to lifeless monotony, —

"Do you think they 'll do anything to him for it, Lysander?"

"I dunno, M'lissy," said the man. "He told the men at the camp it was self-defense, and mebbe he can prove it; but bein' no witnesses, they may lock 'im up fer a year or two, just to give 'im time to cool off. It 'll be good fer 'im. He ought n't to be so previous with his firearms."

"But paw was — they don't know — mebbe" — panted the girl brokenly.

"Yes, yes, M'lissy, I don't doubt yer paw was aggravatin'; but we don't know, and we 'd better not take sides. The young feller ain't nothin' to us, an' yer paw was — well, he was yer *paw*, we 've got to remember that."

Lysander put his foot on the hub and

mounted to the high seat, gathering up the reins and putting on the brake. The mules started forward, and then held back in a protesting way, and the wagon went creaking and scraping through the sand down the mountain road.

## VII.

In the days that passed wearisomely enough before the trial, Melissa heard much that did not tend to soothe her harassed little soul. Lysander, having taken refuge behind the assertion that it "was n't becomin' fer the fam'ly to take sides," bore his mother-in-law's stinging sarcasms in virtuous silence.

"Seems to me it depends on which side you take," sneered the old woman. "I don't see anything so very impullite in gettin' mad when yer pap 's shot down like a dog."

Lysander braced himself judicially.

"We don't none of us know nothin' about it," he contended. "If I 'd 'a' been there and 'a' seen the scrimmage, I 'd 'a' knowed what to think. As 't is, I dunno what to think, and there 's no law that kin make

you think when you don't hev no fax to base your thinkun' on."

"Some folks lacks other things besides fax to base their thinkun' on," the old woman jerked out sententiously.

Lysander pressed the tobacco into his cob pipe, and scratched a match on the sole of his boot.

"I think they 've been middlin' fair," he said, between puffs, "fixin' up that water business. It 's my opinion the young feller 's at the bottom of it, — they say his father 's well off; 't enny rate, it 's *fixed*, an' you 're better off 'n you wuz, — exceptin', uv course, your affliction, an' that can't be helped." The man composed his voice very much as he would have straightened a corpse in which he had no personal interest. "I 'm in fer shuttin' up."

"They don't seem to want you to shut up," fretted his mother-in-law. "They 've s'peenied *you*."

"They 're welcome to all I know; 't ain't much, an' 't won't help nor hender, as I c'n see, but such as it is, they kin hev it an' welcome."

Lysander stood in the doorway, with his

hat on the back of his head. He tilted it over his eyes, as he made this avowal, and sauntered toward the stable, with his head thrown back, peering from under the brim, as if its inconvenient position were á matter entirely beyond his control.

Melissa was washing dishes at a table in the corner of the kitchen. She hurried a little, trembling in her eagerness to speak to Lysander alone. She carried the dish-pan to the kitchen door to empty it, and the chickens came scuttling with half-flying strides from the shade of the geraniums where they were dusting themselves, and then fled with a chorus of dismayed squawks as the dish-water splashed among them. The girl hung the pan on a nail outside, and flung her apron over her head. She could see Lysander's tilted hat moving among the low blue gums beside the shed. She drew the folds of her apron forward to shade her face, and went down the path with a studied unconcern that sat as ill upon her as haste. Lysander was mending the cultivator; he looked up, but not as high as her face.

"'Llo, M'lissy," he said, as kindly as was

compatible with a rusty bit of wire between his teeth.

The girl leaned against the shaded side of a stack of baled barley hay.

"Lysander," she began quaveringly, "Lysander, if you 'd seen paw shot, an' knowed all about it, could they make you tell — would you think you 'd ought to tell?" She hurried her questions as they had been crowding in her sore conscience. "I mean, of course, if you 'd seen it, Lysander."

Her brother-in-law straightened himself, and set his hat on the back of his head without speaking. Melissa could feel him looking at her curiously.

"Of course, that 's all I mean, Lysander, — just if you 'd seen it; would you tell?" she faltered.

"M'lissy," said the man impressively, "if I 'd seen my own paw killed, an' nobody asked me to tell, I 'd keep my mouth most piously shut; that 's what I 'd do."

"But if he was mad, Sandy, an' tried to kill somebody else, and, oh," — her voice broke into a piteous wail, — "if they wuz thinkun' o' hangin' 'im!"

"They ain't a-goin' to hang nobody,

M'lissy," said Lysander confidently, — "hangin' has gone out o' fashion. And I don't think it 's becomin' fer the fam'ly to interfere, especially the women folks; besides, we don't none of us know nothin' about it, you see. Don't you fret about things you don't know nothin' about. The law 'll have to take its course, M'lissy. That young feller 's goin' to git off reasonable,— very reasonable, indeed, considerin'."

Melissa rubbed her feet in the loose straw, restless and uncomforted.

"When 's the trial, Lysander?" she asked, after a little pause, during which her companion resumed his encounter with the rusty wire he was straightening.

"The trial, M'lissy, is set for tuhmorruh," Lysander replied, a trifle oracularly. "I 'm a-goin' down because they 've sent fer me; if they had n't 'a' sent, I would n't 'a' gone. I don't know nothin' exceptin' that yer paw had one of his spells," — inebriety was always thus decorously cloaked in Lysander's domestic conversation, — "an' went off up the cañon that mornin' r'arin' mad about the spring. Of course they don't know that 's

all I know, — if they knowed it, perhaps they would n't want me; but if they had n't sent fer me, you can bet I 'd stick at home closer 'n a scale-bug to an orange-tree, Melissy, perticular if I was a young girl, an' did n't know nothin' whatever about the hull fracas. An' young girls ain't expected to know about such things; it ain't proper fer 'em, especially when they 're members of the fam'ly."

This piece of highly involved wisdom quieted Melissa very much as a handkerchief stuffed into a sufferer's mouth allays his pain. She went about the rest of the day silent and distressed.

At daybreak the next morning, Lysander harnessed the dun-colored mules and drove to Los Angeles.

The sun rose higher, and the warm dullness of a California summer day settled down upon the little mountain ranch. Heat seemed to rise in shimmering waves from the yellow barley stubble. The orange-trees cast dense shadows with no coolness in them, and along the edge of the orchard the broad leaves of the squash-vines hung in limp dejection upon their stalks. The heated air

was full of pungent odors: tar and honey and spice from the sage and eucalyptus, with now and then a warmer puff of some new wild fragrance from far up the mountain-side.

"We 're a-goin' to have three hot days," said Mrs. Sproul, looking anxiously over the valley from the shelter of her husband's hat. "Sandy 'll swelter, bein' dressed up so. I do hope they won't keep him long. He don't know nothin' about it, noway. Seems to me they might 'a' believed him, when he said so."

Mother Withrow had fallen into a silence full of the eloquence of offended dignity, when Lysander disappeared. Like all tyrannical souls, she was beginning to feel a bitterness worse than that of opposition, — the bitterness of deceit. She knew that Lysander had deceived her, and the knowledge was bearing its fruit of humiliation and chagrin. The evident liberality of Forrester's course in deeding her a share of the cañon, greater, it was said, than the loss occasioned by the drying up of Flutterwheel Spring, had struck at the root of hatreds and preconceptions that were far more vital to her

than the mere proprietorship of the water right. She felt hampered and defrauded by the circumstances that forbade her to turn and fling the gift back in his face. To this grim, gray-haired tyrant, dying of thirst seemed sweet compared with the daily bitterness of hearing her enemy praised for his generosity. She sat in the doorway fanning herself with her apron, and made no reply to her daughter's anxious observation.

"I calc'lated to rub out a few things this mornin'," continued Mrs. Sproul, "but somehow I don't feel like settlin' down to washin' or anythin'; an' the baby 's cross, bein' all broke out with the heat. I wonder what 's become of M'lissy."

"She 's up in the oak-tree out at the barn," called William T. Sherman, who with other fraternal generals was holding a council of war over a gopher caught in a trap. "Letterlone; she 's as cross as Sam Patch."

"M'lissy takes her paw's death harder 'n I calc'lated she 'd do," commented Minerva, virtuously conventional; "she 's a good deal upset."

The old woman sniffed audibly.

"I reckon you 'll all live through it," she said frostily.

Melissa, swinging her bare feet from a branch of the dense live oak in the barnyard, had watched Lysander's departure with wistful eagerness, entirely unaware that he had divined her secret, and was mannishly averse to having the "women folks" of his family mixed up in a murder trial. Now that he was really gone, and she was left to the dreariness of her own reflections, she grew wan and white with misery.

"I had ought to 'a' told it," she moaned. "If they don't hang 'im, they may put 'im in jail, and that 's awful." She thought of him, so straight and lithe and gay, grown pale and wretched; manacled, according to Ulysses's graphic description, with iron chains so heavy that he could not rise; kept feebly alive on bread and water, and presided over by a jailer whose ingenious cruelty knew no limit but the liveliness of the boy's fiendish imagination.

"A year or two," Lysander had said, as if it were a trifle. She looked back a year, and tried to measure the time, losing herself in the hazy monotony of her past, and con-

scious only of the remoteness of certain events that served as landmarks in her simple experience, — events not yet two years distant.

"Orange-pickun' before last ain't nigh two years ago," she mused, "an' 't ain't a year yet sence Lysander hauled grapes from the Mission to the winery; an' the year before that he was over to Verdugo at the bee-ranch, an' come home fer the grape-haulin' at Santa Elena. That 's when Hooker was born; he 'll be two years old this fall; it 's ever so long ago. He could n't stand bein' in jail that long; some folks could, but he could n't. He sings, and laughs out loud, and goes tearin' around so lively. It 'ud kill 'im."

She slipped down from the tree, and started toward the house. The path was hot to her bare feet, and the wind came in heated gusts from the mountains. The young turkeys panted, with uplifted wings, in the shade of the dusty geraniums, whose scarlet blossoms were glowing in fierce tropical enjoyment of the glaring sun. The hounds went languidly, with lolling tongues, from one shaded spot to another, blinking

their comments on the weather at their human companions, and snapping in a half-hearted way at unwary flies.

Mrs. Sproul and her mother were still seated on the little porch when Melissa appeared.

"Why don't you come in out of the heat, child?" called her sister, as reproachfully as if Melissa were going in the opposite direction. "We hain't had such a desert wind for more 'n a year. I keep thinkin' about Lysander. I 've heern of people bein' took down with the heat, and havin' trouble ever afterward with their brains."

"Lysander ain't a-goin' to have any trouble with his brains," said her mother significantly.

Mrs. Sproul turned a highly insulted gaze upon the old woman's impassive face, and tilted her husband's hat defiantly above her diminutive, freckled countenance.

"Lysander kin have as much trouble with his brains as anybody," she said, with bantam-like dignity, straightening her limp calico back, and tightening her grasp on the baby in her arms.

The old woman elevated her shaggy

brows, and made a half-mocking sound in imitation of the spitting of an angry kitten.

Mrs. Sproul's pale blue eyes filled with indignant tears, and she turned toward Melissa, who looked up from the step, a gleam of sisterly sympathy lighting up the wan dejection of her young face.

"I would n't fret, Minervy," she said kindly; "Lysander don't mind the heat. People never get sunstruck here; it 's only back East. I don't think it 's so very warm, nohow."

"Oh, it 's hot enough," sniffled Mrs. Sproul, relaxing her spine under Melissa's sympathy; "but it ain't altogether the heat. I don't like Lysander bein' mixed up with murderers and dangerous characters; not but what he 's able to pertect himself, havin' been through the war, but it seems as if the harmlessest person wuz n't safe when folks go 'round shootin' right an' left without no provocation whatever. I think we 'll all be safer when that young feller 's locked up in San Quentin, — which they 'll do with him, Lysander thinks."

Mrs. Sproul drew a corner of her apron tight over her finger, and carefully wiped a

speck from the corner of the baby's eye, gazing intently into the serene vacuity of its sleeping countenance as she spoke.

Melissa caught her breath, and turned and gazed fixedly through the shimmering haze of the valley toward Los Angeles. The girl herself did not know the resolution that was shaping itself from all the tangled facts and fancies of her brain. Perhaps, if she had been held to strict account, she would have said it was an impulse, "a sudden notion" in her parlance, that prompted her to arise the next morning, before the faintest thrill of dawn, and turn her steps toward the town in the valley. It was not a hopeful journey, and she could not analyze the motive that lashed her into making it; nevertheless she felt relieved when the greasewood shut the cabin, with its trailing pepper-trees and dusty figs and geraniums, from her sight, and she was alone on the mountain road. It was not a pleasure to go, but it was an undeniable hardship to stay. There had been no fog in the night, and from the warm stillness of the early morning air the girl knew that the heat had not abated. She was quite un-

mindful of the landscape, gray and brown and black in the waning light of the misshapen and belated moon, and she was far from knowing that the man she was making this journey to save would have thought her a fitting central figure in the soft blur of the Millet-like etching of which she formed a part.

She threw back her sunbonnet and trudged along, carrying her shoes tied together by their leathern strings and hung across her arm, — an impediment to progress, but a concession to urban prejudices which she did not dream of disregarding. She meant to put them on in the seclusion of the Arroyo Seco, where she could bathe her dusty feet and rest awhile; but remembering the heat of yesterday, she wished to make the most of the early morning, deadly still and far from refreshing though it was. The sea-breeze would come up later, she hoped, not without misgivings; and the grapes were beginning to turn in the vineyards along the road; she would have something to eat with the bit of corn-bread in her pocket. Altogether she was not greatly concerned about herself or the difficulties of

her journey, so absorbed was she in the vague uncertainty that lay at its end.

The sun rose hot and pitiless, and the dust and stones of the road grew more and more scorching to her feet. The leaves of the wild gourd, lying in great star-shaped patches on the ground, drooped on their stems, and the spikes of dusty white sage by the road hung limp at the ends, and filled the air with their wilted fragrance. The sea-breeze did not come up, and in its stead gusts of hot wind from the north swept through the valley as if from the door of a furnace. People talked of it afterward as "the hot spell of 18—," but in Melissa's calendar it was "the day I walked to Loss Anjelus," — a day so fraught with hopes and fears, so full of dim uncertainties and dread and longing, that the heat seemed only a part of the generally abnormal conditions in which she found herself.

It was afternoon before she reached the end of her journey, entering the town between rows of low, soft-tinted adobes, on the steps of which white-shirted men and dusky, lowbrowed women and children ate melons and laughed lazily at their neigh-

bors, showing their gleaming teeth. She knew where the courthouse stood, its unblushing ugliness protected by the rusty Frémont cannon, and made her way wearily toward it through the more modern and busier streets.

The men who sat in front of the stores in various degrees of undress, slapping each other resoundingly on their thinly clad backs, and discussing the weather with passers-by in loud, jocular tones, were, to Melissa's sober country sense, a light-minded, flippant crowd, to whom life could have no serious aspect. She looked at them indifferently, as they sat and joked, or ran in and out of open doors where there was a constant fizz as of something perpetually boiling over, and made her way among them, quite unmindful of her dusty shoes and wilted sunbonnet, and yet vaguely conscious that at another time she might have cared.

At the door of the courthouse, two of this same loosely clad, noisy, perspiring species were slapping their thighs and choking in hilarious appreciation of something which a third was reading from an open

paper. The reader made way for Melissa, backing and reading at the same time, and the sound of their strangely incongruous mirth followed her up the narrow, unswept, paper-strewn staircase into the stifling heat of the second floor. She stopped there an instant, leaning against the railing, uncertain what to do.

One of a pair of double doors opened, and a young man, swinging an official-looking document, crossed the hall as if he might be walking in his sleep, and went into a room beyond; kicking the door open, catching it with his foot, and kicking it to behind him with a familiarity that betokened long acquaintance, and inspired Melissa with confidence in his probable knowledge of the intricate workings of justice. She stood still a moment, clutching the limp folds of her skirt, until the young man returned; then she took a step forward.

"I 've come to tell what I know about the shootin'. I saw it," she faltered.

The somnambulistic young man shut one eye, and inclined his ear toward her without turning his head.

"Shooting? What shooting?"

"Up in Sawpit Cañon — Mr. Sterling done it — but I saw it — nobody knows it, though." The words came in short, palpitating sentences that died away helplessly.

Her listener hesitated for an instant, scratching the blonde plush of his cropped scalp with his lead-pencil. Then he stepped forward and kicked one of the double doors open, holding it with his automatic foot.

"Bawb! oh, *Bawb!*" he called; "'m yer."

A short fat man, with an unbuttoned vest and a general air of excessive perspiration, waddled past the bailiff and confronted Melissa. He smiled when he saw her, displaying an upper row of teeth heavily trimmed with gold, a style of personal adornment which impressed Melissa anew with the vagaries of masculine city taste.

"Witness in the Withrow murder case, pros'cuting 'torney," said the bailiff over his shoulder, by way of introduction, as he disappeared through the door.

Melissa looked at the newcomer, trembling and dumb.

"Come in here, my girl," he said, steaming ahead of her through a door in front of

them; "come right in here. Is it pretty hot up your way?"

"Yes, sir," she quavered, not taking the chair he cleared for her. "I come down to tell about the shootin': I 'd ought to 'a' told before, but I was scared. Mr. Sterling done it, but paw was mad; he picked up Mr. Sterling's gun and tried to kill 'im, — I saw it all. I was hid in the sycamores. You had n't ought to hang 'im or do anything to 'im: he could n't help it."

The prosecuting attorney smiled his broad, gilt-edged, comfortable smile, and laid his pudgy hand reassuringly on Melissa's shoulder.

"It 's all right, my little girl," he said. "We 're not going to hang Mr. Sterling this time; he was discharged this afternoon; but he 'll be obliged to you, all the same. He 's over at the hotel taking a nap. You just run along home, and the next time don't be afraid to tell what you know."

The girl turned away silently, and went down the stairs and out into the street. She stood still a moment on the hot pavement, looking in the direction of the hotel in which the man for whom she had made

her fruitless journey was sleeping. Then she set her face patiently toward home. The reflection from the pavement seemed to blind her; she felt suddenly faint and tired, and it was with a great throb of relief that she heard a familiar voice at her elbow, and turned with a little tearless sob to Lysander.

## VIII.

The Worthingtons' private parlor in the Rideau House was hot and close, although a fog had drifted in at nightfall and cooled the outside air. Two of its occupants, however, were totally unmindful of the heat and the mingled odors of upholstery, gas, and varnish that prevailed within its highly decorated walls. The third, a compact, elderly, prosperous-looking gentleman, whose face wore a slight cloud of *ennui*, stood by the open window gazing out, not so much from a desire to see what was going on outside as from a good-natured unwillingness to see what was taking place within.

Mr. Frederick Sterling, a shade paler and several shades graver than of old, was looking at the elderly gentleman's daughter in

an unmistakable way; and the daughter herself, a fair creature, with the fairness of youth and health and plenty, was returning his gaze with one that was equally unmistakable.

"Do you mean to tell me, Frederick, that the poor thing *walked* all that distance in that intolerable heat?"

The young man nodded dismally.

"That 's what they say, Annette. It makes one feel like a beast."

"I don't see why you need say that, Frederick. I 'm sure they ought to have done something, after the awful danger you were in." The young woman swept toward him, with one arm outstretched, and then receded, and let her hand fall on the back of a chair, as her father yawned audibly.

"Of course there was danger, Annette; but that does n't remove the fact that I was a hot-headed idiot."

"You must n't talk so. It is not polite to me. I am not going to marry an idiot."

"But you 've promised."

The young people laughed into each other's eyes.

"Frederick," said the young girl, after a

little silence, during which they drifted into the rigid plush embrace of a sofa, "I 'm going up to see that girl and thank her."

The young man leaned forward and caught her wrists.

"You — angel!"

"Yes, I 'm going to-morrow. Of course you can't go."

"Oh, good Lord, no," groaned her lover.

"But papa can. There will be plenty of time; we don't leave until evening. And in spite of what her father did, I feel kindly toward the girl. There must be some good in her; she seemed to want to do you justice. How does she look, Frederick?"

The soft-voiced inquisitor drew her wrists from the young fellow's grasp, and flattened his palms between hers by way of an anæsthetic.

"Did you ever see her?"

"Oh, yes, once or twice. A lank, forlorn, little red-headed thing,— rather pretty. Oh, my God, Annette!"

The girl raised the tips of his imprisoned fingers to her lips.

"Could n't you send her something, Frederick, some little keepsake, something she

would like, if she would like anything that was n't too dreadful ? "

The young fellow's face brightened.

" Annette, you *are* an angel."

" No, I 'm not ; there are no brunette angels. I am a very practical young woman, and I 'm going with you to buy something for that poor girl ; men don't know how to buy things." She dropped her lover's hands, and went out of the room, returning with her hat and gloves, and, going to her father's side, she said : " Papa, Frederick and I are going out for awhile. He wants to get a little present for a poor young girl, the daughter of that awful wretch who — that — you know. It seems she saw it all, and came down to say that Frederick was not to blame. Of course it was unnecessary, for the judge and every one saw at once that he did perfectly right ; but it *was* kind of her, and it was a *very* hot day. Do you mind staying here alone ? — or you can go with us, if you like."

" No, thank you ; I don't mind, and I don't like," said the elderly gentleman dryly.

" And you 'll not be lonely ? "

" No, I think not ; I 've been getting

acquainted with myself this trip, and I find I 'm a very interesting though somewhat unappreciated old party."

The young girl put down her laughing face, and her father swept a kiss from it with his gray mustache. Then the two young creatures went out into the lighted streets, laughing and clinging to each other in the sweet, selfish happiness that is the preface to so large a part of the world's misery.

They came back presently with their purchase, a somewhat obtrusively ornate piece of jewelry, which Annette pronounced semi-barbarous; being, she said, a compromise between her own severely classical taste and that of Sterling, which latter, she assured her father, was entirely savage.

She fastened the trinket at her throat, where it acquired a sudden and hitherto unsuspected elegance in the eyes of her lover, and then unclasped it, and held it at arm's-length in front of her before she laid it in its pink cotton receptacle.

"I do hope she will be pleased, Frederick," she said, with a soft, contented little sigh.

And the young man set his teeth, and

smiled at her from the depths of a self-abasement that made her content a marvel to him.

Annette went up to the mountains with her father the next day, stopping the carriage under the pepper-trees in front of the Withrow cabin, and stepping out a little bewildered by the meanness and poverty and squalor of it all.

The children came out and stood in a jagged, uneven row before her, and the hounds sniffed at her skirts and walked around her curiously. Mrs. Sproul appeared in the doorway with the baby, shielding its bald head from the sun with her husband's hat, and Lysander emerged from between two dark green rows of orange-trees across the way, his hoe on his shoulder.

"I want to see your daughter, the young girl, — the one that walked to Los Angeles the other day," she said, looking at the woman.

"M'lissy?" queried Mrs. Sproul anxiously. "Lysander, do you know if M'lissy 's about?"

Her husband nodded backward.

"She 's over in the orchard, lookin' after the water. I 'll" —

The stranger took two or three steps toward him and put out her hand.

"May I go to her? Will you show me, please? I want to see her alone."

Lysander bent his tall figure and moved along the rows of orange-trees, until he caught a glimpse of Melissa's blue drapery.

"She 's right down there," he said, pointing between the smooth trunks with his hoe. "It 's rough walkin', — I 've just been a-throwin' up a furrow fer the irrigatin'; but I guess you c'n make it."

She went down the shaded aisle between the orange-trees, Mrs. Sproul looking after her dubiously, as a person guilty of a serious breach of decorum in asking to see any one alone.

Melissa leaned on her hoe, and watched her approach with listless amazement. She took in every detail of her daintily clad loveliness, — the graceful sway of her drapery as she walked, the cluster of roses in her belt, and the wide hat with its little forest of curling plumes.

"You are Melissa?" The stranger put out her softly gloved hand, and Melissa took it in limp, rustic acquiescence. "Mr. Ster-

ling wished me to come, — and I wanted to come myself, — to thank you for what you did; it was very kind, and you were very brave to undertake it, and for one you scarcely knew — it was very, *very* good of you."

Melissa colored to the little ripples of vivid hair about her temples.

"Is he gone away?" she asked, rubbing her hands up and down on the worn handle of the hoe.

"No, but he is going this evening. Of course he could not stay. It would be very painful for him, for all of you. Is there anything he can do for you? He will be so glad if he can be of use to you in any way" — She hesitated, watching the pained look grow in her listener's face.

"Ain't he never comin' back?" asked Melissa wistfully.

Annette opened her brown eyes wide, and fixed them on the girl's face.

"I don't know," she faltered.

"I 'd like to keep his hankecher," Melissa broke out tremulously. "I hurt my arm oncet up where they was blastin', and he tied it up fer me with his hankecher. I was

takin' it to 'im that Sunday. I had it all washed and done up. I 'd like to keep it, though, — if you think he would n't care." Her eyes filled, and her voice broke treacherously. "That 's all. Tell 'im good-by."

Annette was gazing at her breathlessly. It came over her like a cloud, the poverty, the hopelessness, the dreariness of it all. She made a little impetuous rush forward.

"Oh, yes, yes," she said eagerly, through her tears; "and he is so sorry, and he sent you these," — she took the roses from her belt, her lover's roses, and thrust them into Melissa's nerveless grasp, — "and I — oh, *I* shall love you always!"

Then she turned, and hurried through the sun and shadow of the orchard back to the carriage.

"I am ready to go now," she said, somewhat stiffly, to her father.

All the way down the dusty mountain road, over which Melissa had traveled so patiently, she kept murmuring to herself, "Oh, the poor thing, — the poor, poor thing!"

Some years afterwards, when Mr. Frederick Sterling's girth and dignity had noticeably increased, he saw among his wife's ornaments a gaudy trinket that brought a curious twinge of half-forgotten pain into his consciousness. He was not able to understand, nor is it likely that he will ever know, how it came there, or why there came over him at sight of it a memory of sycamores and running water, and the smell of sage and blooming buckthorn and chaparral.

# ALEX RANDALL'S CONVERSION.

## I.

Mrs. Randall was piecing a quilt. She had various triangular bits of calico, in assorted colors, strung on threads, and distributed in piles on her lap. She had put on her best dress in honor of the minister's visit, which was just ended. It was a purple, seeded silk, adorned with lapels that hung in wrinkles across her flat chest, and she had spread a gingham apron carefully over her knees, to protect their iridescent splendor.

She was a russet-haired woman, thin, with that blonde thinness which inclines to transparent redness at the tip of the nose and chin, and the hand that hovered over the quilt patches, in careful selection of colors for a "star and chain" pattern, was of a glistening red, and coarsely knotted at the knuckles, in somewhat striking contrast to her delicate face.

Her husband sat at a table in one corner of the spotless kitchen, eating a belated lunch. He was a tall man, and stooped so that his sunburned beard almost touched the plate.

"Mr. Turnbull was here," said Mrs. Randall, with an air of introducing a subject rather than of giving information.

The man held a knife-load of smear-case in front of his mouth, and grunted. It was not an interrogative grunt, but his wife went on.

"He said he could 'a' put off coming if he 'd known you had to go to mill."

Mr. Randall swallowed the smear-case. His bushy eyebrows met across his face, and he scowled so that the hairs stood out horizontally.

"Did you tell him I could 'a' put off going to mill till I knowed he was coming?"

His thick, obscure voice seemed to tangle itself in the hay-colored mustache that hid his mouth. His tone was tantalizingly free from anger.

"I wish you would n't, Elick," said his wife reproachfully; "not before the children, anyway."

The children, a girl of seven and a boy of four, sat on the doorstep in a sort of dazed inertia, occasioned by the shock of the household's sudden and somewhat perplexing return to its week-day atmosphere just as they had adjusted themselves to the low Sabbatic temperature engendered by the minister's presence.

The girl had two tightly braided wisps of hair in varying hues of corn-silk, curving together at the ends like the mandibles of a beetle. She turned when her father spoke, and looked from him to her mother with a round, blue-eyed stare from under her bulging forehead. The boy's stolid head was thrown back a little, so that his fat neck showed two sunburned wrinkles below his red curls. His gingham apron parted at the topmost button, disclosing a soft, pathetic little back, and his small trousers were hitched up under his arms, the two bone buttons which supported them staring into the room reproachfully, as if conscious of the ignominy of belonging to masculine garb under the feminine eclipse of an apron.

Mrs. Randall bent a troubled gaze upon

her offspring, as if expecting to see them wilt visibly under their father's irreverence.

"Mary Frances," she said anxiously, "run away and show little brother the colts."

The girl got up and took her brother's hand.

"Come on, Wattie," she said in a small, superior way, very much as if she had added: "These grown people have weaknesses which it is better for us to pretend not to know. They are going to talk about them."

Mrs. Randall waited until the two little figures idled across the dooryard before she spoke.

"I don't think you ought to act the way you do, Elick, just because you don't like Mr. Turnbull; it ain't right."

The man dropped his chin doggedly, and fed himself without lifting his elbows from the table.

"I can't always manage to be at home when folks come a-visiting," he said in his gruff, tangled voice.

"You was at church on Sabbath when Mr. Turnbull gave out the pastoral visita-

tions: he knew that as well as I did. I could n't say a word to-day. I just had to set here and take it."

"No, you did n't, Matilda: you did n't have to stay any more than I did."

"Elick!"

The woman's voice had a sharp reproof in it. He had touched the Calvinistic quick. She might not reverence the man, but the minister was sacred.

"Well, I can't help it," persisted her husband obstinately. "You can take what you please off him. I don't want him to say anything to me."

"Oh, he did n't *say* anything, Elick. What was there to say?"

"He does n't gener'ly keep still because he has nothin' to say."

The man gave a muffled, explosive laugh, and pushed back his chair. Mrs. Randall's eyelids reddened. She laid down her work and got up.

"I guess I 'll take off this dress before I clear up the things," she said, in a voice of temporary defeat.

Her husband picked up the empty water-pail as he left the kitchen, and filled it at

the well. When he brought it back there was no one visible.

"Need any wood, Tildy?" he called toward the bedroom where she was dressing.

"No, I guess not." The voice was indistinct, but she might have had her skirt over her head. Alex made a half-conciliatory pause. He preferred to know that she was not crying.

"How you been feelin' to-day?"

"Middlin'."

She was not crying. The man gave his trousers a hitch of relief, and went back to his work.

There had been a scandal in Alex Randall's early married life. The scattered country community had stood aghast before the certainty of his guilt, and there had been a little lull in the gossip while they waited to see what his wife would do.

Matilda Hazlitt had been counted a spirited girl before her marriage, and there were few of her neighbors who hesitated to assert that she would take her baby and go back to her father's house. It had been a nine-days' wonder when she had elected to believe in her husband. The injured girl had been

an adopted member of the elder Randall's household, half servant, half daughter, and it was whispered that her love for Alex was older than his marriage. Just how much of the neighborhood talk had reached Matilda's ears no one knew. The girl had gone away, and the community had accepted Alex Randall for his wife's sake, but not unqualifiedly.

Mrs. Randall had never been very strong, and of late she had become something of an invalid, as invalidism goes in the country, where women are constantly ailing without any visible neglect of duty. It had "broke her spirit," the women said. Some of the younger of them blamed her, but in the main it was esteemed a wifely and Christian course that she should make this pretense of confidence in her husband's innocence for the sake of her child. No one wondered that it wore upon her health.

Alex had been grateful, every one acknowledged, and it was this fact of his dogged consideration for Matilda's comfort that served more than anything else to reinstate him somewhat in the good opinion of his neighbors. There had been a good deal

of covert sympathy for Mrs. Randall at first, but as years went by it had died out for lack of opportunity to display itself. True, the minister had made an effort once to express to her his approval of her course, but it was not likely that any one else would undertake it, nor that he would repeat the attempt. She had looked at him curiously, and when she spoke the iciness of her tone made his own somewhat frigid utterances seem blushingly warm and familiar by contrast.

"It would be strange," she said, "if a wife should need encouragement to stand by her husband when he is in trouble."

Alex had hated the minister ever since, and had made this an excuse for growing neglect of religious duties.

"It is no wonder he dreads to go to preachin', with that awful sin on his conscience," the women whispered to one another. They always whispered when they spoke of sin, as if it were sleeping somewhere near, and were liable to be aroused. Matilda divined their thoughts, and fretted under Alex's neglect of public service. She wished him to carry his head high, with the dignity

of innocence. It appalled him at times to see how perfectly she apprehended her own part as the wife of a man wrongfully accused. He was not dull, but he had a stupid masculine candor of soul that stood aghast before her unswerving hypocrisy. She had never asked him to deny his guilt; she had simply set herself to establish his innocence.

Small wonder that she was tried and hampered by his failure to "act like other people," as she would have said if she had ever put her worry into words. It had been one of many disappointments to her that he should go to mill that day, instead of putting on his best coat and sitting in sullen discomfort through the pastor's "catechising." She had felt such pride in his presence at church on Sabbath; and then had come the announcement, "Thursday afternoon, God willing, I shall visit the family of Mr. Alexander Randall." How austerely respectable it had sounded! And the people had glanced toward the pew and seen Alex sitting there, with Wattie on his knee. And after all he had gone to mill, and left her to be pitied as the wife of a man who was afraid to face the preacher in his own house!

Matilda slipped the rustling splendor of her purple silk over her head, and went back to the limpness of her week-day calico with a sigh.

When Alex came in for the milk-pail, she was standing by the stove, turning the long strips of salt pork that curled and sizzled in the skillet. Her shoulders seemed to droop a trifle more in her working-dress, but her face was flushed from the heat of the cooking.

"There was n't any call to get a warm supper for me, Tildy. I ain't hungry to speak of."

"Well, I guess anyway I 'd better make some milk gravy for the children; I did n't have up a fire at noon, see'n' you was away. It ain't much trouble."

Her voice was resolutely cheerful, and Alex knew that the discussion was ended. But after the supper things were cleared away, she said to Mary Frances, "Can't you go and let your pa see how nice you can say your psa'm?"

And the child had gone outside where Alex was sitting, and had stood with her hands behind her, her sharp little shoulders

moving in unison with her sing-song as she repeated the verses.

"'That man hath perfect blessedness
Who walketh not astray
In counsel of ungodly men,
Nor stands in sinners' way,
Nor sitteth in the scorner's chair:
But placeth his delight
Upon God's law, and meditates
On his law day and night.'"

The child caught her breath with a long sigh, and hurried on to the end.

"'In judgment, therefore, shall not stand
Such as ungodly are;
Nor in th' assembly of the just
Shall wicked men appear.
For why? The way of godly men
Unto the Lord is known;
Whereas the way of wicked men
Shall quite be overthrown.'"

Then she stood still, waiting for her father's praise.

He caught her thin little arm and drew her toward him, where she could not look into his face.

"You say it very nice, Mary Frances, — very nice indeed."

And Mary Frances smiled, a prim little

satisfied smile, and nestled her slim body against him contentedly.

II.

Ten years drifted away, and there was a new minister in the congregation at Blue Mound. The Reverend Andrew Turnbull had died, and his successor had come from a Western divinity school, with elocutionary honors thick upon him. Under his genial warmth the congregation had thawed into a staid enthusiasm. To take their orthodoxy with this generous coating of zeal and kindliness and graceful rhetoric, and know that the bitterness that proclaimed it genuine was still there, unimpaired and effective, was a luxury that these devout natures were not slow to appreciate. A few practical sermons delivered with the ardor and enthusiasm of a really earnest youth stamped the newcomer as a "rare pulpiter," and a fresh, bubbling geniality, as sincere as it was effusive, opened a new world to their creed-encompassed souls. Not one of them thought of resenting his youthful patronage. He was the ambassador of God to them, and, while they would have been shocked

beyond measure at his appearance in the pulpit in a gray coat, they perceived no incongruity between the brightness of his smile and the gloom of his theology.

This man came into Alex Randall's house with no odor of sanctity about him, and with no knowledge of an unhappy past. Matilda had grown older and stooped more, and her knot of sandy hair was less luxuriant than it had once been, but there were no peevish, fretful lines on her face. It began to grow young again now that she saw Alex becoming "such friends with the minister." Mary Frances was a tall, round-shouldered girl, teaching the summer school, and Wattie was a sturdy boy in round-abouts, galloping over the farm, clinging horizontally to half-broken colts, and suffering from a perpetual peeling of the skin from his sunburned nose. Matilda was proud of her children. She hoped it was not an ungodly pride. She knelt very often on the braided rug, and buried her worn face in the side of her towering feather bed, while she prayed earnestly that they might honor their *father* and their mother, that their days might be long in the

land which the Lord their God had given them. If she laid a stress upon the word "father," was it to be wondered at? And the children did honor their father so far as she knew. If he would only join the church, and share with her the responsibility of their precious souls! It had been hard for her, when Wattie was baptized, to stand there alone and feel the pitying looks of the congregation behind her. Her pulse quickened now at every announcement of communion, and she listened with renewed hopefulness when Mr. Anderson leaned forward in the pulpit and gave the solemn invitation to those who had sat under the kindly influence of the gospel for many years untouched to shake off their soul-destroying lethargy, and come forward and enroll themselves on the Lord's side.

It was the Friday after one of these appeals that Alex came into the kitchen and said awkwardly, —

"I guess I 'll change my clothes, Matildy, and go over t' the church this afternoon and meet the Session."

She felt the burden of years lifted from her shoulders. She said simply, —

"I 'm real glad of it, Elick. You 'll find two shirts in the middle drawer. I think the under one 's the best."

Matilda went back to her work, and thought how the stain would be wiped away. "They 'll have to give in that he 's a good man now," she said to herself. She fought with the smile that would curve her lips. The minister would announce it on Sabbath. "By letter from sister congregations," and then the names; and then, "On profession of faith, Alexander Randall." She tried to stifle her pride. It must be pride, she said, — it must be something evil that could make her so very, *very* happy.

III.

It was late when Alex came home, and he did the chores after supper. Mary Frances and Wattie had gone to singing-school and Matilda was alone in the kitchen when her husband came in. He sat down on the door-step, with his back to her and his head down, and stuck the blade of his jack-knife into the pine step between his feet. There was a long silence, and when he spoke his voice had a husky embarrassment.

"There 's something I suppose I 'd ought to have talked to you about all this time, Matildy, but somehow I could n't seem to do it. I had a talk with Mr. Anderson, and he brought it up before the Session, and they did n't seem to think anything more need to be said about it. It 's all dead and gone now, and of course you know I 've been sorry time and time and again. I don't suppose I ought to say it, but it was n't altogether my fault. She never did act right, but then, of course" —

"*Elick!*"

The man heard his name in a quick gasp behind him. He turned and looked up. Matilda was standing over him, with a white, distorted face.

"Do you mean — to tell me — that it was *true?*"

She got the words out with an effort. Her chin worked convulsively. She looked an old, old woman.

"True?"

The man lifted a dazed, questioning face to hers. He groped his way back through twenty years. This woman had believed in him all the time! He saw her take two or

three steps backward and fall into a chair. They sat there until the room grew dark. The wind began to blow through the house, and Alex got up and put out the cat and shut the door. Then he went to his wife's side.

"Don't you think you 'd better go to bed, Matildy?"

She shook her head.

"I suppose there 's such a thing as repentance," he went on, with a rasp in his voice, "and a blotting out of sins, is n't there, Matildy?"

She put out her hand and pushed him away. He went into the bedroom and shut the door. She could hear him pulling off his boots on the bootjack. Then he walked about a little in his stocking feet, and presently the bed-cord squeaked, and she knew he was in bed. Later, she could hear his heavy breathing. She sat there in the dark until she heard Wattie whistling; then she got up and lit a candle and opened the door softly. The boy came loping up the path.

"Mary France 's got a beau!" he broke out, with a little snort of ridicule.

His mother laid her hand on his arm.

"Wattie," she said, "I want you to go out to the barn and harness up old Doll and the colt. I want you to go with me and Mary Frances over to grandfather Hazlitt's."

The boy's mouth and eyes grew round.

"To-night?"

"Yes, right away. I don't want you to ask any questions, Wattie. Mother never yet told you to do anything wrong. Just go out and get the team, and be as quiet as you can."

The boy "hunched" his shoulders, and started with long, soft strides toward the barn. His mother heard him begin to whistle again and then stop abruptly. She stood on the step until she heard voices at the gate, and Mary Frances came up the walk between the marigolds and zinnias and stood in the square of light from the door. She met her mother with a pink, bashful face.

"I want you to go upstairs, Mary Frances, and get your other cloak and my blanket shawl. Wattie 's gone to fetch the horses. You and him and me 's goin' over to grandfather Hazlitt's."

"To grandfather Hazlitt's this time o' night! Is anybody sick?"

"No, there 's nobody sick. I don't want you should ask any questions, Mary Frances. Just get on your things, and do as mother says; and don't make any more noise than you can help."

The young girl went into the house, and came out presently with her mother's shawl and bonnet. They could hear the wagon driving around to the gate.

Matilda went into the kitchen and blew out the candle. Then she closed the door quietly, and went down the walk with her daughter.

Matilda Randall was not at communion on the next Sabbath. She was "down sick at her father's," the women said, and they thought it hard that she should be absent when Alex joined the church.

"I don't doubt it 's been quite a cross to her, the way he 's held out," one of them remarked; "and it seems a pity she could n't have been there to partake with him the first time."

But the weary woman, lying so still in her old room in her father's house, had a heavier cross.

Her mother tiptoed into the room, the

morning after her arrival, and stood beside her until she opened her eyes.

"Elick is outside, Matildy. Shall I tell him to come in?"

She shook her head, and closed her eyes again wearily.

The old woman went out, and confronted her gray-haired husband helplessly.

"It beats me, Josiah, what he could 'a' said or done that she 's took to heart so, after what she 's put up with all these years."

Mr. Anderson preached the funeral sermon very touchingly, when it was all over. The tears came into his young eyes, and there were treacherous breaks in his rhetoric as he talked.

"This sister in Israel, whose lovely and self-sacrificing life has just ended so peacefully, lived to see the dearest wish of her heart gratified, — the conversion of the husband of her youth to the faith of her fathers. We are told that some have died of grief, but if this frail heart ceased to beat from any excess of emotion, it must have been, my friends, from the fullness of joy, — the joy 'that cometh in the morning.'"

But Alex Randall knew better.

## IDY.

### I.

Señora Gonzales was leaning upon the corral gate in the shade of the pomegranates, looking out over the lake. The lake itself was not more placid than the señora's face under her black rebozo. Perhaps a long life of leaning and gazing had given her those calm, slow-moving eyes, full of the wisdom of unfathomable ignorance. The landscape on the opposite shore was repeated in the water below, as if to save her the trouble of raising her heavily fringed lids. To the southward a line of wild geese gleamed snow-white, like the crest of a wave. Half a dozen dogs were asleep in the smoothly swept dooryard behind her, and a young Mexican, whose face was pitted by smallpox, like the marks of raindrops in dry sand, leaned against the gnarled trunk of a trellised grapevine, clasping his knees, and sending slow wreaths of smoke from his cigarette. The barley in the field behind the

house was beginning to head, and every breath of wind stirred it in glistening waves. Beyond the field shone a yellow mist of wild mustard. The California spring, more languorous, even with its hint of moisture, than the cloudless summer, sent a thousand odors adrift upon the air. Even the smell of garlic hanging about the señora could not drown the scent of the orange-blooms, and as for Ricardo's cigarette, surely no reasonable mortal could object to that. Ricardo himself would have questioned the sanity of any one who might have preferred the faint, musky fragrance of the alfilaria to the soothing odor of tobacco. He closed his eyes in placid unconsciousness of such vagaries of taste, and rocked himself rhythmically, as if he were a part of the earth, and felt its motion.

A wagon was creaking along the road behind the house, but it did not disturb him. There were always wagons now ; Ricardo had grown used to them, and so had the señora, who did not even turn her head. These restless Americanos, who bought pieces of land that were not large enough to pasture a goat, and called them ranchos — caramba!

what fools they were, always a-hurrying about!

The wagon had stopped. Well, it would be time enough to move when some one called. A dust-colored hound that slept at the corner of the house, stretched flat, as if moulded in relief from the soil upon which he lay, raised his head and pricked up one ear; then arose, as if reluctantly compelled to do the honors, and went slowly around the house.

"Of course they 've got a dawg; forty of 'em, like enough!" It was a girl's voice, pitched in a high, didactic key. "I guess I c'n make 'em understand, pappy; I 'll try, anyway."

She came around the house, and confronted Ricardo, who took his cigarette from his mouth, and looked at her gravely without moving. The señora turned her head slowly, and glanced over her shoulder.

The girl smiled, displaying two rows of sound teeth shut tightly together.

"How do you do?" she said, raising her voice still higher, and advancing toward the señora with outstretched hand. "I suppose you 're Mrs. Gonsallies."

The señora disentangled one arm slowly from her rebozo, and gave the newcomer a large, brown, cushiony hand.

"This is my fawther," continued the girl, waving her left hand toward her companion; "sabby?"

The man stepped forward, and confronted the señora. She looked at him gravely, and shook her head. He was a small, heavily bearded man, with soft, bashful brown eyes, which fell shyly under the señora's placid gaze.

"She don't understand you, Idy," he said helplessly.

The girl caught his hand, and squeezed it reassuringly. "Never mind, pappy," she said, lowering her voice; "I 'll fetch her. Now, listen," she went on, fixing her wide gray eyes on the señora, and speaking in a loud, measured voice. "I — am — Idy Starkweather. This — is —my — fawther. There! Now! Sabby?"

Evidently she considered failure to understand English a species of physical disability which might be overcome by strong concentration of the will.

The señora turned a bland, unmoved face

upon her son. The eyes of the newcomers followed her gaze. Ricardo held his cigarette between his fingers, and blew a cloud of smoke above his head.

"She don' spik no Englis'," he said, looking at them mildly.

The girl flushed to the roots of her hay-colored frizz of hair. "You 're a nice one!" she said. "Why did n't you speak up?"

Ricardo gave her another gentle, undisturbed glance. "Ah on'stan' a leetle Englis'; Ah c'n talk a leetle," he said calmly.

The girl hesitated an instant, letting her desire for information struggle with her resentment. "Well, then," she said, lowering her voice half sullenly, "my fawther here wants to ask you something. We live a mile or so down the road. We 've come out from Ioway this summer — me and mother, that is; pappy here come in the spring, did n't you, pappy? An' he bought the Slater place, an' there 's ten acres of vineyard, an' Barden, — he 's the real 'state agent over t' Elsmore, you know 'im, — he told my fawther they wuz all raisin-grapes, white muscat, — did n't he, pappy? — an' my fawther here paid cash down fer the

place, an' the vineyard 's comin' into bearin' next fall, an' Parker Lowe, — he has a gov'ment claim on section eighteen, back of our ranch, — maybe you know 'im, — he says they 're every one mission grapes — fer makin' wine. He helped set 'em out, an' he says they got the cuttin's from your folks; but I thought he wuz sayin' it just to plague me, so my fawther here thought he 'd come an' ask. If they are wine-grapes, that felluh Barden lied — did n't he, pappy?"

The Mexican gazed at her pensively through the smoke of his cigarette.

"Yass, 'm," he said slowly and softly — "yass, 'm; Ah gass he tell good deal lies. Ah gass he don' tell var' much trut'."

"Then they *are* mission grapes?"

"Yass, 'm; dey all meession grapes; dey mek var' good wahn."

The girl's face flamed an angry red under her crimpled thatch of hair. She put out her hand with a swift, protecting gesture, and caught her father's sleeve.

The little man's cheeks were pale gray above his shaggy beard. He took off his hat, and nervously wiped the damp hair from his forehead. His daughter did not

look at him. Ricardo could see the frayed plume on her jaunty turban quiver.

"My fawther here 's a temperance man, a prohibitionist: he don't believe in wine; he hates it; he would n't touch it with a ten-foot pole. That felluh Barden knowed it — did n't he, pappy? He lied!" She spoke fiercely, catching her breath between her sentences.

The Mexican threw away the end of his cigarette, and gazed after it with pensive regret.

"Some folks don' lak wahn," he said amiably. "Ah lak it var' well mahse'f. Ah gass he al's tell var' big lies, Mist' Barrd'n."

The girl turned away, still grasping her father's arm. Then she came back, with a sudden and somewhat bewildering accession of civility. "Addyoce," she said, bowing loftily toward the señora. The plume in her hat had turned in the afternoon breeze, and curved forward, giving her a slightly martial aspect.

"Addyoce, Mr. Gonsallies. We 're much obliged, — ain't we, pappy? Addyoce."

Ricardo touched his sombrero. "Good-

evenin', mees," he said in his soft, leisurely voice ; "good-evenin', señor."

When the last ruffle of Miss Starkweather's green "polonay" had disappeared around the corner of the adobe house, the señora drifted slowly across the dooryard in her voluminous pink drapery, and sat down beside her son. There was a thin stratum of curiosity away down in her Latin soul. What had Ricardo done to make the señorita so very angry? She was angry, was she not?

Oh, yes, she was very angry, but Ricardo had done nothing. Señor Barden had sold her father ten acres of wine-grapes, and the old man did not like wine ; he liked raisins. Santa Maria! Did he mean to eat ten acres of raisins? He need not drink his wine ; he could sell it. But the señorita was very angry; she would probably kill Señor Barden. She had said she would kill him with a very long pole — ten feet. Ricardo would not care much if she did. Señor Barden had called him a greaser. But as for a man who did not like wine — caramba!

II.

Parker Lowe's government claim was a fractional section, triangular in shape, with its base on the grant line of Rancho la Laguna, and its apex high up on the mountain-side. Parker's cabin was perched upon the highest point, at the mouth of the cañon, in a patch of unconquerable boulders. Other government settlers were wont to remark the remoteness of his residence from the tillable part of his claim, but Parker remained loyal to his own fireside.

"It 's a sightly place," he asserted, "and nigh to the water, and it ain't no furder goin' down to work than it would be comin' up fer a drink, besides bein' down-grade. I lay out to quit workin' some o' these days, but I don't never lay out to quit drinkin'."

This latter determination on Parker's part had come to be pretty well understood, and the former would have obtained ready credence except for the fact that one cannot very well quit what he has never begun. Without risking the injustice of the statement that Parker was lazy, it is perhaps safe to say that he belonged by nature to

the leisure class, and doubtless felt the accident of his birth even more keenly than the man of unquenchable industry who finds himself born to wealth and idleness. "Holdin' down a claim" had proved an occupation as well adapted to his tastes as anything that had ever fallen to his lot, and his bachelor establishment among the boulders was managed with an economy of labor, and a resultant of physical comfort, hitherto unknown in the annals of housekeeping. The house itself was of unsurfaced redwood, battened with lath to keep out the winter rain. The furniture consisted of a wide shelf upon which he slept, two narrower ones which held the tin cans containing his pantry stores, a bench, a table which "let down" against the wall by means of leathern hinges when not in use, a rusty stove, and a much-mended wooden chair. From numerous nails in the wall smoky ends of bacon were suspended by their original hempen strings, and the size of the grease-spot below testified to the length of the "side" which Parker had carried in a barley sack from Barney Wilson's store at Elsmore, five miles away on the other side

of the lake. Parker surveyed these mural decorations with deep, inward satisfaction not untinged with patriotism.

"There wa'n't many folks right here when I filed on to this claim," he had been known to remark, "an' I may have trouble provin' up. But if the Register of the General Land-Office wants to come an' take a look, he c'n figger up from them ends o' bacon just about how long I 've lived here, an' satisfy himself that I 've acted fair with the gover'ment, which I 've aimed to do, besides makin' all these improvements."

The improvements referred to were hardly such as an artist would have so designated, but Parker surveyed them with taste and conscience void of offense. The redwood shanty; a dozen orange-trees, rapidly diminishing in size and number by reason of neglect and gophers; a clump of slender, smoky eucalypti; a patch of perennial tomato-vines; and a few acres of what Barney Wilson called "veteran barley," — it having been sown once, and having "volunteered" ever since, — constituted those additions to the value of the land, if not to the landscape, upon which Parker based his homestead rights.

Since the Laguna Ranch had been subdivided, and settlers had increased, and especially since Eben Starkweather had bought the Slater place, and Ida Starkweather had invaded the foot-hills with her vigorous, self-reliant, breezy personality, Parker had been contemplating further improvements in his domicile — improvements which, in moments of flattered hope, assumed the dignity of a lean-to, a rocking-chair, and a box-spring mattress. The dreams which had led him to a consideration of this domestic expansion he had confided to no one but Mose Doolittle, who had a small stock-ranch high up on the mountain, and who found Parker's cabin a convenient resting-place on his journeys up and down the trail.

"I tell ye," he had said to Mose, "that girl is no slouch. Her pa is an infant in arms, a babe an' a suckling, beside her. Her ma is sickly; one o' your chronics. Idy runs the ranch. I set here of evenin's, an' watch 'em through this yer field-glass. She slams around that place like a house a-fire. It 's inspirin' to see her. Give me a woman that makes things hum, ever-ee time!"

"Somebody said she had a hell of a temper," ventured Mose, willing to be the recipient of further confidences.

"Somebody lied. She's got spunk. When she catches anybody in a mean trick she don't quote poetry to 'im; she gives 'im the straight goods. Some folks call that temper. I call it sand. There'll be a picnic when she gets hold o' Barden!"

Parker raised the field-glass again, and leveled it on the Starkweather homestead.

"There's the infant now, grubbin' greasewood. He's a crank o' the first water; you'd ought to hear 'im talk. He went through the war, an' he's short one lung, an' he's got the asmy so bad he breathes like a squeaky windmill, an' he won't apply fer a pension because he says he was awful sickly when he enlisted, an' he thinks goin' South an' campin' out saved his life. That's what I call lettin' yer 'magination run away with ye."

"What does Idy think about it?" queried Mose innocently.

"Idy stands up fer her pa; that's what I like about 'er. I like a woman that'll back a man up, right er wrong; it's proper an'

female. It 's what made me take a shine to 'er."

"You would n't want her to back Barden up." Mose made the suggestion preoccupiedly, with his eyes discreetly wandering over the landscape, as if he had suddenly missed some accustomed feature of it.

Parker lowered the glass and glanced at him suspiciously. "No, sir-ee! If there 's any backin' done there, Barden 'll do it. She 'll make 'im crawfish out o' sight when she ketches 'im. That 's another thing I like about 'er; she 'll stand up fer a feller; that is, fer any feller that b'longs to 'er — that is, I mean, fer a feller she b'longs to."

Mose got up and turned around, and brushed the burr-clover from his overalls.

"Well, I guess I must be movin'," he said, with a highly artificial yawn. "Come here, you Muggins!" he called to his burro, which had strayed into the alfilaria. "Give me an invite to the weddin', Parker. I 'll send you a fresh cow if you do."

Parker held the glass between his knees, and looked down at it with gratified embarrassment.

"There 's a good deal to be gone through

with yet, Mose," he said dubiously. "I set up here with this yer field-glass, workin' myself up to it, an' then I go down there, an' she comes at me so brash I get all rattled, an' come home 'thout 'complishin' anythin'. But I 'll make it yet," he added, with renewed cheerfulness. "She sewed a button on fer me t' other day. Now, between ourselves, Mose, don't ye think that's kind o' hopeful?"

Hopeful! Mose would say it was final. No girl had ever sewed a button on for him. When one did, he would propose to her on the spot. He wondered what Parker was thinking of not to seize such an opportunity.

"That 's what I had ought to 'a' done," acknowledged Parker, shaking his head ruefully. "Yes, sir; that 's what I'd ought to 'a' done. I had ought to 'a' seized that opportunity an' pressed my suit."

"That 's the idea, Park," said his companion gravely, as he bestrode Muggins, and jerked the small dejected creature out into the trail. "You 'd ought to 'a' pressed your suit; there 's nothin' a woman likes better 'n pressin' your suit. Whoop-la, Muggins!"

Some time after Mose had disappeared up the cañon, Parker heard a loud echoing laugh. He turned his head to listen, and then raised the glass and leveled it on Starkweather's ranch.

"I thought at first that was Idy," he said to himself, "but it wa'n't. She 's got a cheerful disposition, but I don't believe she 'd laugh that a-way when she 's a-learnin' a bull calf to drink; that ain't what I call a laughin' job. Jeemineezer! don't she hold that cantankerous little buzzard's head down pretty. Whoa there, Calamity! don't you back into the chicken corral. That 's right, Idy, jam his head into the bucket, an' set down on it — you 're a daisy!"

III.

On the strength of Mose's friendly encouragement, Parker betook himself next day to where Eben Starkweather was trimming greasewood roots, and moved about sociably from one hillock to another while his neighbor worked. Nothing but the ardor of unspoken love would have reconciled Parker to the exertion involved, for Eben worked briskly, in spite of his singularity

of lung and the disadvantages of "asmy," and the greasewood was not very thick on the ground he had been clearing. The grotesque gnarled roots were collected in little heaps, like piles of discarded heathen images, and Eben hacked about among them, a very mild-mannered but determined iconoclast.

"I 'll have to keep at it pretty studdy," he explained apologetically to his visitor, "fer they say we 're like enough not to have any more rain, and I 'm calc'latin' to grub out the vineyard before the ground hardens up."

"Goin' to yank them vines all out, are ye?"

"That 's the calc'lation."

Parker clasped one knee, and whetted his knife on the toe of his boot reflectively.

"'Pears to me ye might sell off that vineyard, an' buy a strip t' other side of ye, an' set out muscats."

"I could n't sell that vineyard," said Eben. He had laid down his axe, and was wiping his forehead nervously with an old silk handkerchief.

"Oh, I reckon ye could," said Parker

easily; "ye got the whole place pretty reasonable."

The little man's bearded mouth twitched. When he spoke, his voice was high and strained.

"I 'd jest as soon keep a saloon; I 'd jest as soon sell wine to a man after it 's made as before it 's made." He wiped the moist inner band of his hat, and then dropped his handkerchief into it, and put it on his head. Parker could see his grimy hand tremble. "I did n't know what I was buyin'," he went on, picking up his axe, "but I 'd know what I was sellin'."

Parker glanced at him as he fell to work. He was a crooked little man, and one shoulder was higher than the other; there was nothing aggressive in his manner. He had turned away as if he did not care to argue, did not care even for a response. Perhaps no man on earth had less ability to comprehend a timid soul lashed by conscience than Parker Lowe. "The hell!" he ejaculated under his breath. Then he sat still a moment, and drew a map of his claim, and the adjoining subdivision, on the ground between his feet. The affectionate

way in which the Starkweather ranch line joined his own seemed suggestive.

"It 'pears to me," he broke out judicially, "that ye could argue this thing out better 'n ye do. Now, if I was in your place, 'pears to me I 'd look at it this a-way. There 's a heap o' churches in Ameriky, an', if I remember right, they mostly use wine for communion. I hain't purtook for some time myself, but I guess I 've got it right. Now all the wine that could be made out o' them grapes o' yourn would n't s'ply half the churches in this country, not to mention Europe an' Asie, an' Afriky; an' as long as that 's the case, I don't see as you 're called on to *know* that your wine 's used fer anything but religious purposes. Of course you can conjure up all sorts o' turrible things about gettin' drunk an' cavin' round, but that 's what I call lettin' yer 'magination run away with ye."

"Your 'magination don't have to run a great ways to see men gettin' drunk," said Eben, with some relaxation of voice and manner. The absence of conviction which Parker's logic displayed seemed a relief to him. His fanaticism was personal, not polemical.

"What 'd ye raise back in Ioway?" asked Parker, with seeming irrelevance.

"Corn."

"How 'd ye reconcile that?"

"I did n't reconcile it; I could n't. I sold out, an' come away."

Parker trimmed a ragged piece of leather from the sole of his boot, and whistled softly.

"Well, I try not to be an extremist," he said, with moderation. "That Barden 's the brazenest liar on this coast. He 'd ought to be kicked by a mule. I 'd like to see Idy tackle 'im."

This suggestive combination of Barden's deserts with his daughter's energy seemed to give Eben no offense.

"Idy 's so mad with him she gets excited," he said mildly. "I can't make 'er see it 's all fer the best. Sence I 've found out about the vines, I 've been glad I bought 'em."

Parker stopped his amateur cobbling, and looked up.

"Ye don't mean it!" he said, with rising curiosity.

"Yes; I 'm glad o' the chance to get red o' them. It 's worth the money."

He turned to pick up another twisted root, displaying the patches on his knees, and the hollowness of his sunken chest.

"The hell!" commented Parker, softly to himself, with a long, indrawn whistle.

"I guess I 'll go down to the house," he said aloud, getting up by easy stages. "I see the cow 's pulled up her stake, an' 's r'airn round tryin' to get to the calf. Mebby Idy 'll need some help."

"She was calc'latin' to move 'er at noon," said Eben, shading his eyes, and looking toward the house. "It must be 'long toward 'leven now. If you 're goin' down, you 'd better stop an' have a bite o' dinner with us."

"Well, I won't kick if the women folks don't," answered Parker amiably; "bachin' 's pretty slow. I 've eat so much bacon an' beans I dunno whether I 'm a hog or a Boston schoolma'am."

Arrived at the corral, where the cow stood with uplifted head snuffing the air, and gazing excitedly at her wild-eyed offspring, his composure suddenly vanished. Miss Starkweather was holding the stake in one hand, and winding the rope about her arm with the other.

"Hello!" she said, with a start, "where on earth 'd you spring from?"

"I see the cow was loose," ventured Parker, "an' I thought you might n't be able to ketch 'er."

"Well, it would n't be fer lack o' practice," responded the girl, with a wide, good-natured smile. "She 's yanked her stake out three times this mornin', an' come cavin' around here as if she thought somebody wanted to run away with 'er triflin' little calf. I guess she likes to have me follerin' 'er 'round."

"She 's got good taste," said Parker gallantly.

The girl laughed, and struck at him with the iron stake.

"Oh, taffy!" she said, looking at him coquettishly from under her frizz. "Ain't you ashamed?"

"No," said Parker, waxing brave. "Gi' me the stake; mebbe I c'n fasten 'er so she 'll stay."

"You 're welcome to try," — the girl slipped her arm out of the coil of rope, — "but I don't b'lieve you can, unless you drill a hole in a boulder, an' wedge the stake in."

Parker led away the cow, mooing with maternal solicitude, and Idy returned to the house. When she reached the kitchen door, she turned and called between the ringing blows of the axe, —

"Oh, Mr. Lowe, mother says won't ye come to dinner?"

"You bet!" answered Parker warmly.

Mrs. Starkweather sat on the doorstep picking a chicken, which seemed to develop a prodigious accession of leg and neck in the process. She had the set, impervious face of a nervous invalid, and her whole attitude, the downward curve of her mouth, and the elevation of her brows, were eloquent of injustice. The clammy, half-plucked fowl in her hand seemed to share her expression of irreparable injury. She allowed her daughter to climb over her without moving, and when Parker appeared she wiped one long yellow hand on her apron, and gave it to him in a nerveless grasp.

"I hope you 'll excuse me fer not gettin' up," she drawled; "I guess you c'n get a-past me. Idy, come an' set a rocker fer Mr. Lowe."

"I 've got my hands in the dough," called her daughter hilariously, from the pantry; "Mr. Lowe 'll have to set on his thumb till I get these biscuits in the pan."

Parker's head swam. The domestic familiarity of it all filled him with ecstasy. He got himself a chair, and inquired solicitously concerning Mrs. Starkweather's health.

"Oh, I 'm just about the same," complained his hostess; "not down sick, but gruntin'. Folks that 's up an' down like I am don't get nigh as much sympathy as they 'd ought. I tell Starkweather, well folks like him an' Idy ain't fittin' comp'ny fer an inv'lid."

"Mr. Starkweather 's lookin' better 'n he did," said Parker, listening rapturously to the thumps of the rolling-pin in the pantry. "I think this climate agrees with 'im."

"Oh, he 's well enough," responded Mrs. Starkweather dejectedly, "if he did n't make 'imself so much extry work. Grubbin' out that vineyard, now! I can't fer the life o' me see" —

"Maw!" called Idy warningly, opening the battened door with a jerk — "you maw! look out, now!"

Mrs. Starkweather drooped her mouth, and raised her brows, with a sigh of extreme and most self-sacrificial virtue.

"Oh, of course Idy fires up if anybody says anythin' ag'in' 'er fawther. I guess that 's always the way; them that does least fer their fam'lies always gets the most credit. I think if some folks was thinkin' more about their dooties an' less about their queer notions, some other folks would n't be laid up with miseries in their backs."

Having thus modestly obscured herself and her sufferings behind a plurality of backs, Mrs. Starkweather arose and dragged herself into the house.

"Gi' me the chicken," said Idy, slamming her biscuits into the oven, and taking the hunchbacked and apparently shivering fowl from her mother. "I ain't a-goin' to have anybody talkin' about pappy, an' you know it. If I was a man, I 'd get even with that lyin' Barden, or I 'd know the reason why."

"That 's just what I was sayin'," returned Mrs. Starkweather, with malicious meekness. "If your fawther was the man he 'd ought to be, he would n't be rode over that way by nobody."

The girl's face flamed until it seemed that her blonde thatch of hair would take fire.

"Pappy ain't to blame," she said angrily; "he can't help thinkin' the way he does. There ain't no call to be mad with pappy; it 's all that miser'ble, lyin' Barden. It 'll be a cold day fer him when I ketch 'im."

Parker gazed at her admiringly. She had laid the chicken on a corner of the table, and was vigorously cutting it into pieces, cracking its bones, and slashing into it with an energy that seemed to her lover deliciously bloodthirsty and homicidal.

"Barden 's got back from the East," he announced. "I see 'im over t' Elsmore Saturday, tryin' to peek over the top of his high collar. You 'd ought to seen 'im; he 's sweet pretty."

The girl refused to smile, but the blaze in her cheeks subsided a little.

"It 's just as well fer him I did n't," she said, whetting her knife on the edge of a stone jar. "He might n't be so pretty after I 'd got done lookin' at 'im."

Parker laughed resoundingly, and the girl's face relaxed a little under his appreciative mirth. When her father stepped

upon the platform at the kitchen door, she left the frying chicken to hiss and sputter in the skillet, and went to meet him.

"Now, pappy," she said, taking hold of him with vigorous tenderness, "I 'll bet you 've been workin' too hard. Here, let me fill that basin, and when you 've washed, you come in an' let Mr. Lowe give ye a pointer on settin' 'round watchin' other folks work." She raised her voice for Parker's benefit. "He come out here fer his health, an' he 's gettin' so fat an' sassy he has to live by 'imself."

Parker's appreciation of this brilliant sally seemed to threaten the underpinning of the kitchen.

Eben smiled up into his daughter's face as he lathered his hairy hands.

"I would n't make out much at livin' by myself, Idy," he said gently.

"You ain't goin' to get a chance," rejoined his daughter, rushing back to her sputtering skillet, and spearing the pieces of chicken energetically; "you ain't goin' to get red o' me, no matter how sassy you are; I 'm here to stay."

"Hold on now," warned Parker; "mind what you 're sayin'."

"I know what I'm sayin'," retorted the girl, tossing her head. "I'd just like to see the man that could coax me away from pappy."

"You'd like to see 'im, would ye?" roared Parker, slapping his knee. "Come, now, that's pretty good. Mebbe if you'd look, ye might ketch a glimpse of 'im settin' 'round som'er's."

The girl lifted the skillet from the stove, and let the flame flare up to hide her blushes.

"He would n't be settin' 'round," she asserted indignantly, jabbing the fire with her fork. "He'd be up an' comin', you c'n bet on that."

"What 's Idy gettin' off now?" drawled Mrs. Starkweather from the other room.

"Gettin' off her base," answered Parker jocosely. Nevertheless, the wit of his inamorata rankled, and after dinner he went with Eben to the barn to "hitch up."

"Idy wants to go over to Elsmore this afternoon," said Eben, "an' I promised to go 'long; but I'd ought to stay with the grubbin'. If you was calc'latin' to lay off anyhow, mebbe you would n't mind the ride. The broncos hain't been used much sence I

commenced on the greasewood, and I don't quite like to have 'er go alone."

"She had n't ought to go alone," broke in Parker eagerly. "That pinto o' yourn 's goin' to kick some o' ye into the middle o' next week, one o' these days. I was just thinkin' I 'd foot it over to the store fer some bacon. Tell Idy to wait till I run up to the house an' get my gun."

Idy waited, rather impatiently, and rejected with contempt her escort's proposal to take the lines.

"When I 'm scared o' this team, I 'll let ye know," she informed him, giving the pinto a cut with the whip that sent his heels into the air. "If ye don't like my drivin', ye c'n invite yerself to ride with somebody else. I 'm a-doin' this."

The afternoon was steeped in the warm fragrance of a California spring. Every crease and wrinkle in the velvet of the encircling hills was reflected in the blue stillness of the laguna. Patches of poppies blazed like bonfires on the mesa, and higher up the faint smoke of the blossoming buckthorn tangled its drifts in the chaparral. Bees droned in the wild buckwheat, and

powdered themselves with the yellow of the mustard, and now and then the clear, staccato voice of the meadow-lark broke into the drowsy quiet — a swift little dagger of sound.

"The barley 's headin' out fast." Parker raised his voice above the rattle of the wagon. "I wished now I 'd 'a' put in that piece of Harrington's."

"Harvest 's a poor time fer wishin'; it 's more prof'table 'long about seedin'-time," said Idy, with a smile that threatened the meshes of her stylishly drawn veil.

Parker set one foot on the dashboard, and swung the other out of the wagon nervously.

"I do a good deal o' wishin' now that ain't very prof'table — time o' year don't seem to make much difference," he said plaintively.

"Well, I guess if I wanted anything I would n't wish fer it a *great* while — not if I could set to work an' get it."

The vim of this remark seemed to communicate itself to the pinto through the tightened rein, and sent him forward with accelerated speed.

Parker glanced at his companion from under the conical shapelessness of his old felt hat, but she kept her eyes on the team, and gave him her jaunty profile behind its tantalizing barrier of meshes and dots.

"Well, I 'll bet if you wanted what I want you 'd be 'most afraid to mention it," he said, reaching down into the tall barley, and jerking up a handful of the bearded heads.

"Well, now, I bet I would n't."

"S'posin' I wanted to get married?"

There was a silence so sudden that it had the effect of an explosion. Then Miss Starkweather giggled nervously.

"That 's just exactly what I do want," persisted Parker desperately, turning his toe inward, and kicking the wagon-box.

There was another disheartening silence. Then the girl's color flamed up under her rusty lace veil. She turned upon him witheringly.

"Well, what are ye goin' to do about it? Set 'round and wait till some girl asks ye?"

Her voice had a fine sarcastic sting in it.

Parker whipped his brown overalls with a green barley-head.

"No; I ain't such a bloomin' idiot as I look."

"I don't know 'bout that," answered the young woman coolly.

Parker faced about.

"Now, look here, Idy," he said; "you 'd ought to quit foolin'. You know what I mean well enough; you 're just purtendin'. You know I want to marry ye."

"Me!" The girl lifted her brows until they disappeared under the edge of her much-becurled bang. "Want to marry *me!* Great Scott!"

"I don't see why it 's great Scott or great anything else," said Parker doggedly.

Idy held the reins in her left hand, and smoothed her alpaca lap with the whip handle, in maiden meditation.

"Well, I don't know as 't is so very great after all," she said, rubbing the folds of her dress, and glancing at him in giggling confusion.

Parker made an experimental motion with his right arm toward the back of the seat. The girl repelled him dexterously with her elbow.

"You drop that, Parker Lowe!" she

said, with dignity. "I ain't so far gone as all that. There 's that Gonsallies felluh lookin' at us. You just straighten up, or I 'll hit ye a cut with this whip!"

Her lover gave a short, embarrassed laugh.

"Oh, come now, Idy; Ricardo don't understand United States."

"Well, I don't care whether he understands United States or not. I guess idiots acts about the same in all languages. I 'll bet a dollar he understands what you 're up to, anyway; so there."

She drove on, in rigid perpendicularity, past the adobe ranch-house of the Gonzales family, and around the curve of the lake-shore, into the sunshine of the wild mustard that fringed the road. Through it they could see the pale sheen of the ripening barley-fields, broken here and there by the darker green of alfalfa.

As the mustard grew taller and denser, Idy's spine relaxed sufficiently to permit a covert, conciliatory glance toward her companion's arm, which hung from the back of the seat in the disappointed attitude it had assumed at her repulse.

"I s'pose you think I 'm awful touchy," she broke out at last, "an' mebbe I am; but before I promise to marry anybody, there 's two things he 's got to promise *me* — he 's got to sign the pledge, an' he 's got to get even with that felluh Barden."

Parker's face, which had brightened perceptibly at the first requirement, clouded dismally at the second.

Idy dropped her chin on the silk handkerchief flaring softly at her throat, and looked at him deliciously sidewise from under her overshadowing frizz.

"I 'll promise *any*thing, Idy," he protested, fervently abject.

Half an hour later they drove into Elsmore with the radiance of their betrothal still about them, and Idy drove the team up, with a skillful avoidance of the curb, before the "Live and Let Live Meat-Market."

"I 'm goin' to get some round steak," she said, giving the lines to Parker, who sprang to the sidewalk, "an' then I 'm goin' over to Saunders's to look at jerseys. You c'n go where you please, but if I see you loafin' 'round a saloon there 'll be a picnic. If

you tie the team, you want to put a halter on the pinto — he 's like me, he hates to be tied; he pulls back. If you hain't got much to do, I think you 'd better make a hitchin'-post of yerself, and not tie 'im."

She stood up in the wagon, preening her finery, and looking down at her lover before she gave him her hand.

"I won't be a hitchin'-post if you hate to be tied," he said, holding out his hands invitingly.

As he spoke, the rider of a glittering bicycle glided noiselessly around the corner, apparently steering straight for Eben's team of ranch-bred broncos. The pinto snorted wildly, and dashed into the street, jerking the reins from Parker's hand, and rolling him over in the dust. There was the customary soothing yell with which civilization always greets a runaway, and a man sprang from a doorway on the opposite side of the street, and flung himself in front of the frightened horses. The pinto reared, but the stranger's hand was on the bridle; a firm and skillful hand it seemed, for the horses came down on quivering haunches, and then stood still, striving to look around

their blinders in search of the modern centaur that had terrified them.

Idy had fallen back into the seat without a word or cry, and sat there bolt upright, her face so white that it gleamed through the meshes of her veil.

"Well," she said, with a long panting breath, "that was a pretty close call fer kingdom come, was n't it?"

The stranger, who was stroking the pinto's nose, and talking to him coaxingly, laughed.

"Hello, Park!" he said as the latter came up. "Cold day, was n't it? Got your jacket pretty well dusted for once, I guess."

The crowd that had collected laughed, and two or three bareheaded men began to examine the harness. While this was in progress, the livery-stable keeper took a look at the pinto's teeth, and they all confided liberally in one another as to what they had thought when they first heard the racket. The young man who had stopped the team left them in the care of a newcomer, and walked around beside Idy.

"Won't you come into the office and rest a little?" he asked.

"Oh, thanks, no," said the girl, with a shuddering, nervous laugh; "I hain't done nothin' to make *me* tired. I think you 're the one that ought to take a rest. If it had n't been fer you I 'd been a goner, sure."

Her rescuer laughed again and turned away, moving his hand involuntarily toward his head, and discovering that it was bare. The discovery seemed to amuse him even more highly, and he made two or three strides to where his hat lay in the middle of the street, and went across to his office, dusting the hat with long, elaborate flirts of his gayly bordered silk handkerchief.

The knot of men began to disperse, and the boys, who lingered longest, finally straggled away, stifling their regret that no one was mangled beyond recognition. Parker climbed into the wagon, and drove over to Saunders's store.

"I don't know as I 'd better buy a jersey to-day," giggled Idy, as she stepped from the wagon to the elevated wooden sidewalk. "I 'm afraid it won't fit. I feel as if I 'd been scared out o' ten years' growth."

IV.

As they drove home in the chill, yellow evening, Idy turned to her lover, and asked abruptly, —

"Who was that felluh?"

"What felluh?"

"The young felluh with the sandy *mus*-tache, the one that stopped the team."

Parker's manner had been evasive from the first, but at this the evasiveness became a highly concentrated unconcern. He looked across the lake, and essayed a yawn with feeble success.

"There was a good many standin' around when I got there. What sort o' lookin' felluh was he?"

"I just told ye; with a sandy mustache, short, and middlin' heavy set."

"Sh-h-h!" said Parker, reaching for his gun. Idy stopped the horses.

A bronze ibis arose from the tules at the water's edge, and flapped slowly westward, its pointed wings and hanging feet dripping with the gold of the sunset. Parker laid down his gun.

"What did you want to shoot at that

thing fer?" asked Idy. "They ain't fit to eat."

"The wings is pretty. I thought you might like another feather in your cap."

The girl gave him a look of radiant contempt, and he spoke again hurriedly, anxious to prevent a relapse in the conversation.

"You was sayin' somethin' to-day about signin' the pledge, Idy: I 've been layin' off to sign the pledge this good while. The next time there 's a meetin' of the W. X. Y. Z. women, you fetch on one o' their pledges, an' I 'll put my fist to it."

"W. C. T. U.," corrected Idy, with emphasis.

"All right; W. C. T. me, if that suits you any better. It 's a long time since I learned my letters, an' I get 'em mixed. But I 've made up my mind on the tee-total business, and don't ye forget it."

"There ain't any danger of *me* forgettin' it," said the young woman significantly. "What ye goin' to do about that other business?" she added, turning her wide eyes upon him abruptly — "about gettin' even with that cheatin' Barden?"

They had driven into the purple shadow of the mountains, and Parker seemed to have left his enthusiasm behind him with the sunlight.

"I don't know," he said gloomily. "Do ye want me to kill 'im?"

"*Kill* him!" sneered the girl; "I want ye *to get even with 'im!* 'T ain't no great trick to kill a man; any fool can do that. I want ye to get ahead of 'im!"

She glowed upon him in angry magnificence.

"Idy," said her lover, sidling toward her tenderly, "when you flare up that a-way, you must n't expect me to think about Barden. You look just pretty 'nough to eat!"

## V.

A week later Eben began grubbing out the vineyard. The weather turned suddenly warm, and the harvest was coming on rapidly. Parker Lowe had gone to Temecula with Mose Doolittle, who was about to purchase a machine, presumably feminine, which they both referred to familiarly as "she," and styled more formally "a second-hand steam-thrasher." It was Monday,

and Idy was putting the week's washing through the wringer with a loud vocal accompaniment of gospel hymn.

Eben had worked steadily since sunrise. The vines were young, and the ground was not heavy, but the day was warm, and he wielded the mattock rapidly, stooping now and then to jerk out a refractory root with his hands. An hour before noon his daughter saw him coming through the apricot orchard, walking wearily, with his soiled handkerchief pressed to his lips. The girl's voice lost its song abruptly, and then broke out again in a low, faltering wail. She bounded across the warm plowed ground to his side.

"Pappy! O pappy!" she cried, breathing wildly, "what is it? Tell me, can't you, pappy?"

The little man smiled at her with his patient eyes, and shook his head. She put her hand under his elbow, and walked beside him, her arm across his shoulders, her tortured young face close to his. When they reached the kitchen door he sank down on the edge of the platform, resting his head on his hand. The girl took off his

weather-beaten hat, and smoothed the wet hair from his forehead.

"O pappy! Poor, little, sweet old pappy!" she moaned, rubbing her cheek caressingly on his bowed head.

Eben took the handkerchief from his lips, and she started back, crying out piteously as she saw it stained with blood. He looked up at her, a gentle, tremulous smile twitching his beard.

"Don't — tell — your — maw," he said, putting out his hand feebly.

The words seemed to recall her. She went hurriedly into the house and close to the lounge where her mother was lying.

"Maw," she said quickly, "you must get up! Pappy 's got a hem'ridge. I want you to help me to get 'im to bed, an' then I 'm goin' fer a doctor."

The woman got up, and followed her daughter eagerly.

"Why, Eben!" she said, when they reached the kitchen door. Her voice was almost womanly; and a real anxiety seemed to have penetrated her hysterical egoism.

They got him to bed tenderly, and propped him up among the white pillows.

His knotted hands lay on the coverlet, gray and bloodless under the stains of hard work. Idy bent over him, tucking him in with little pats and crooning moans of sympathy. When she had finished, she dropped her wet cheek against his beard.

"I'm goin' fer the doctor, pappy," she whispered; "I won't be gone but a little while," — then rushed down the path to the stable, and flung the harness on the pinto.

The buggy was standing in the shed, and she caught the shafts and dragged it out with superabundant energy, as if her anxiety found relief in the exertion. A few minutes later she drove out between the rows of pallid young eucalyptus-trees that led to the road, leaning eagerly forward, her young face white and set beneath the row of knobby protuberances that represented the morning stage of her much cherished bang. It was thus that she drove into Elsmore, the rattling of the old buggy and the spots of lather on the pinto's sides exciting a ripple of curiosity, which furnished its own solution in the fact that it was "that there Starkweather girl," who was generally conceded to be "a great one."

She stopped her panting horse before the doctor's office, and sprang out.

"Are you the doctor?" she asked breathlessly, standing on the threshold, with one hand on each side of the casing.

A man in his shirt-sleeves, who was writing at the desk, turned and looked at her. It was the same man who had prevented the runaway. He began to smile, but the girl's stricken face stopped him.

"Dr. Patterson has gone to the tin-mine," he said, getting up and coming forward; "he will not be home till to-morrow."

Idy grasped the casing so tightly that her knuckles shone white and polished.

"My fawther 's got a hem'ridge," she said, swallowing after the words. "I don't know what on earth to do."

"A hemorrhage!" said the young man with kindly sympathy. "Well, now, don't be too much alarmed, Miss —"

"Starkweather," quavered Idy.

"Starkweather? Oh, it 's Mr. Starkweather. Why, he 's a friend of mine. And so you 're his daughter. Well, you must n't be too much alarmed. I 've had a great many hemorrhages myself, and I 'm

good for twenty years yet." He had taken his coat from a nail at the back of the room, and was putting it on hurriedly. "Prop him up in bed, and don't let him talk, and give him a spoonful of salt-and-water now and then. My horse is standing outside, and I'll go right down to Maravilla and fetch a doctor. I'll come up on the other side of the lake, and get there almost as soon as you do — let me help you into your buggy. And drive right on home, and don't worry."

He had put on his hat, and they stood on the sidewalk together.

Idy made a little impulsive stoop toward him, as if she would have taken him in her arms.

"Oh!" she gasped, her eyes swimming, and her chin working painfully; "I just think you're the very best man I ever saw in all my life!"

A moment later she saw him driving a tall black horse toward the lake at a speed that brought her the first sigh of relief she had known, and made her put up her hand suddenly to her forehead.

"Good gracious me!" she exclaimed un-

der her breath — "if I did n't forget to take down my crimps!"

Two or three times as she drove home through the warm odors of the harvest noon her anxiety was invaded by the recollection of this man, to whose promptness and decision her own vigorous nature responded with a strong sense of liking; and this liking did not suffer any abatement when he came into her father's sick-room with the doctor, and the invalid looked at the stranger, and then at her, with a faint, troubled smile.

"Don't try to speak, Mr. Starkweather," said the visitor cheerfully; "I 've made your daughter's acquaintance already. We want you to give your entire attention to getting well, and let us do the talking."

He went out of the room, and strolled about the place while the doctor made his call, and when it was over he went around to the kitchen, where Idy was kindling a fire, and said: —

"Doctor Patterson thinks your father will be all right in a day or so, Miss Starkweather. Be careful to keep him quiet. I 'm going to drive around to the station, so the doctor can catch the evening train, and save my

driving him down to Maravilla; and I 'll go on over to Elsmore and get this prescription filled, and bring the medicine back to you. Is there anything else you 'd like from town — a piece of meat to make beef-tea, or anything?"

"Well, I would n't mind much if you *would* bring me a piece of beef," said Idy, pausing with a stick of redwood kindling across her knee. Then she dropped it, and came forward. "We 're *ever* so much obliged to ye — pappy 'n' all of us. Seem 's if you always turn up. I think you 've been just awful good and kind — an' us strangers, too."

"Oh, you 're not strangers," laughed the young man, lifting his hat; "I 've known your father ever since he came."

He went around the house, and got into the cart with the doctor. "Starkweather 's a crank," he said, as they drove off, "but he 's the kind of crank that makes you wish you were one yourself. When I see a man like that going off with consumption, and a lot of loafers getting so fat they crowd each other off the store boxes, I wonder what Providence is thinking of."

"He works too hard," growled the doctor, with the savagery of science. "What can Providence do with a man who grubs greasewood when he ought to be in bed!"

It was moonlight when the stranger returned, and handed the packages to Idy at the kitchen door.

"Pappy 's asleep," she whispered, in answer to his inquiries; "he seems to be restin' easy."

"Is there no one about the place but yourself and mother, Miss Starkweather?"

Idy shook her head.

"Well, then, if you don't mind, I think I will put my horse in the barn, and sleep in the shed here, on the hay. If you should need any one in the night, you can call me. I haven't an idea but that your father will be all right, but it 's a little more comfortable to have some one within call."

"Well," said Idy, dropping her hands at her sides, and looking at him in admiring bewilderment, "if you ain't just— Have you had anythin' to eat?" she broke off, with sudden hospitality.

"Oh yes, thank you; I had dinner at Els-

more," laughed the young man, backing out into the shadow. "Good-night."

Half a minute later she followed him down the walk, carrying a heavy blanket over her arm. He had led his horse to the water-trough, and the moonlight shone full upon him as he stood with one arm thrown over the glossy creature's neck.

"I brought you this here blanket, Mr. — "

"Barden," supplied the young man, carelessly.

Idy sank back against the corral fence as if she were stunned.

"Barden!" she repeated helplessly. "Is your name Barden?"

"Yes."

She stood breathless a moment, and then burst out: —

"An' you 're him! *you* — an' doin' this way, after the way you 've done — an' him sick — an' me talkin' to ye — an' — an' — everything!"

The two torrents of hate and gratitude had met, and were whirling her about wildly.

The young man pushed his hat back on

his head, and stared at her in sturdy, unflinching amazement.

"My dear young lady, what on earth do you mean?" he asked quietly.

"I mean that I didn't know that you was *him* — the man that sold my father this place, an' lied to him about the vineyard — told him they was raisin-grapes, an' they was n't — an' you knowed he was a temp'rance man, a prohibitionist. An' him tryin' to grub 'em out, an' gettin' sick — an' bein' so patient, an' never hurtin' nobody —" she ended in a wild, angry sob that seemed to swallow up her voice.

"Miss Starkweather," said the young fellow steadily, "I certainly did sell this place to your father, and if I told him anything about the vineyard I most certainly told him they were raisin-grapes; and upon my soul I thought they *were*. Aren't they?"

"No," sobbed Idy, "they ain't; they're wine-grapes! He was grubbin' 'em out today. That's what hurt 'im — I'm afraid he'll die!"

"You must n't be afraid of that. Dr. Patterson says he will get better. But we

must see that he does n't do any more grubbing. When Slater gave me this for sale," he went on, as if he were reflecting aloud, "he said there were ten acres of vineyard. I can't swear that he told me what the vines were, or that I asked him. But it never occurred to me that any man — even an Englishman — would plant ten acres of wine-grapes when there was n't a winery within fifty miles of him."

VI.

Parker Lowe borrowed one of Mose Doolittle's mules Monday evening, and rode from Temecula to Jake Levison's saloon at Maravilla. It was understood when he left the thresher's camp that he would probably "make a night of it," and Mose gave him a word of friendly warning and advice.

"You want to remember, Park, that the old man is down on the flowing bowl; an' from what I 've heard of the family I think it 'll pay you to keep yourself solid with the old man."

"I 'm a-goin' up to the drug-store to get some liniment for Dave Montgomery's lame shoulder," returned Parker, with a knowing

wink at his companion, as he flung himself into the saddle; "but I hain't signed no pledge yet — not by a jugful," he called back, as the mule jolted lazily down the road.

It was a warm night, and half a dozen loafers were seated on empty beer-kegs in front of Levison's door when Parker rode up. Levison got up, and began to disengage himself from the blacksmith's story as he saw the newcomer dismount; but the blacksmith raised his voice insistently.

"'There don't no dude tell me how to pare a hoof,' says I; 'I 'll do it my way, or I don't do it;' an' I done it, an' him kickin' like a steer all the time" —

"Who?" asked one of the other men.

"Barden."

"What was he doin' down here?"

"He came down for Doc Patterson. That teetotal wreck on the west side o' the lake took a hem'ridge — I furget his name, somethin'-weather: pretty dry weather, judgin' from what I hear."

"Starkweather?"

"Yes, Starkweather; I guess he 's pretty low."

Parker started back to the post where his

mule was tied. Then he turned and looked into the saloon. Levison had gone in and was wiping off the counter expectantly.

"It won't take but a minute," he apologized to himself.

It took a good many minutes, however, and by the time the minutes lengthened into hours Parker had ceased to apologize to himself, and insisted upon taking the bystanders into his confidence.

"I 'm — I 'm goin' to sign the pledge," he said, with an unsteady wink, "an' then I 'm goin' to get merried, — yes, sir, boys; rattlin' nice girl, too, — 'way up girl, temperance girl. But there 's many a cup 'twixt the slip and the lip — ain't there, boys? Yes, sir, 'twixt the cup and the slip — yes, sir — yes, sir — ee." Then his reflections driveled off into stupor, and he sat on an empty keg with the conical crown of his old felt hat pointed forward, and his hands hanging limply between his knees.

When Levison was ready to leave he stirred Parker up with his foot, and helped him to mount his mule. The patient creature turned its head homeward.

It was after daybreak when Parker rode

into the Starkweather ranch, and presented himself at the kitchen door. The night air had sobered him, but it had done nothing more. Idy was standing by the stove with her back toward him. She turned when she heard his step.

"Why, Park!" she said, with a start; then she put up her hand. "Don't make a noise. Pappy 's sick."

He came toward her hesitatingly.

"So I heard down at Maravilla last night, Idy."

Her face darkened.

"And you been all night gettin' here?"

He bent over her coaxingly.

"Well, you see, Idy"—

The girl pushed him away with both hands, and darted back out of reach.

"Parker Lowe," she said, with a gasp, "you 've been drinkin'!"

Parker hung his head sullenly.

"No, I hain't," he muttered; "not to speak of. Whose horse is that out 'n the corral?"

The girl looked at him witheringly.

"I don't know as it 's any of your pertic'-lar business, but I don't mind tellin' you that horse b'longs to *a gentleman!*"

"A gentleman," sneered Parker.

"Yes, *a gentleman;* if you don't know what that is you 'd better look in the dictionary. You won't find out by lookin' in the lookin'-glass, I can tell you that."

"Oh, come now, Idy, you had n't ought to be so mad; I had n't signed the pledge yet."

He took a step toward her. The girl put out her hands warningly, and then clasped her arms about herself with a shudder.

"Don't you come near me, Parker Lowe," she gasped. "What do I care about the pledge! Did n't you *tell* me you 'd stop drinkin'? Won't a man that tells lies with his tongue tell 'em with his fingers? Do you suppose I 'd marry a man that 'u'd come to me smellin' of whiskey, an' *him* lyin' sick in there? Can't you see that he 's worth ten thousand such folks as you an' me? I don't want a man that can't see that! I 'm done with you, Parker Lowe," — her voice broke into a dry sob; "I want you to go away and stay away! It ain't the drinkin' — it 's *him* — can't you understand?"

And Parker, as he climbed toward his lonesome cabin, understood.

# THE COMPLICITY OF ENOCH EMBODY.

## I.

THE afternoon train wound through the waving barley-fields of the Temecula Valley and shrieked its approach to the town of Muscatel. It was a mixed train, and half a dozen passengers alighted from the rear coach to stretch their legs while the freight was being unloaded.

Enoch Embody stood on the platform with the mail-bag in his hand, and listened to their time-worn pleasantries concerning the population of the city and the probable cause of the failure of the electric cars to connect with the train.

Enoch was an orthodox Friend. There was a hint of orthodoxy all over his thin, shaven countenance, except at the corners of his mouth, where it melted into the laxest liberality.

A swarthy young man, with a deep scar across his cheek, swung himself from the

platform of the smoking-car, and came toward him.

"Is there a stopping-place in this burg?" he called out gayly.

"Thee 'll find a hotel up the street on thy right," said Enoch.

The stranger looked at him curiously.

"By gum, you 're a Quaker," he broke out, slapping Enoch's thin, high shoulder. "I have n't heard a 'thee' or a 'thou' since I was a kid. It 's good for earache. Wait till I get my grip."

He darted into the little group of men and boys, who were listening with the grim appreciation of the rural American to the badinage of the conductor and the station agent, and emerged with a satchel and a roll of blankets.

"Now, uncle, I 'm ready. Shall we take the elevated up to the city?" he asked, smiling with gay goodfellowship up into Enoch's mild, austere face.

The old man threw the mail-bag across his shoulder.

"I 'll take thee as far as the store. Thee can see most of the city from there."

The young fellow laughed noisily, and

hooked his arm through his companion's gaunt elbow. Enoch glanced down at the grimy, broken-nailed, disreputable hand on his arm, and a faint flush showed itself under the silvery stubble on his cheeks.

"By gum, this town 's a daisy," said the stranger, sniffing the honey-laden breeze appreciatively and glancing out over the sea of wild flowers that waved and shimmered under the California sun; "nice quiet little place — eh?"

"Thee hears all the noise there is," answered Enoch gravely.

The young fellow gave a yell of delight and bent over as if the shaft of Enoch's wit had struck him in some vital part. Then he disengaged his arm and writhed in an agony of mirth.

"Holy Moses!" he gasped, "that 's good. Hit 'im again, uncle."

Enoch stood still and looked at him, a mild, contemptuous sympathy twinkling in his blue eyes.

"Is thee looking for a quiet place?" he asked.

The newcomer reduced his hilarity to an intermittent chuckle, and resumed his affectionate grasp on Enoch's arm.

"That 's about the size of it, uncle. I 've knocked around a good deal, and I 'm suffering from religious prostration. I 'm looking for a nice, quiet, healthy place to take a rest — to recooperate my morals, so to speak. Good climate, good water, good society. Everything they don't have in — some places. What 's the city tax on first-class residence property close in?"

"I think thee 'll find it within thy means," said Enoch dryly. "Has thee a family?"

"Well, you might say — yes," rejoined the stranger, "that is, I 'm married. My wife 's not very well. I want to build a seven by nine residence on a fashionable street and send for her. I 'm going to draw up the plans and specifications and bid on the contract myself, and I think by rustling the foreman I can get everything but the telephone and the hot water in before she gets here. Relic of the ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay?" he asked, pointing to a vacant store building across the grass-grown street; "or bought up by the government, maybe, to keep out competition in the post-office business — hello, is this where you hang out?"

Enoch turned into the combined store and post-office, and the stranger stood on the platform, bestowing his tobacco-stained smile generously upon the bystanders.

"Thee 'll find the hotel a little further up the street," said Enoch; "there may be no one about; I think I saw Isaac and Esther Penthorn driving toward Maravilla this afternoon. But they 'll be back before dark. Thee can make thyself at home."

"You 're right I can," assented the newcomer with emphasis; "I see you 've caught on to my disposition. Isaac and Esther will find me as domestic as a lame cat. Be it ever so homely there 's no place like hum. By-by, uncle; see you later."

He went up the street, walking as jauntily as his burden would permit, and Enoch looked after with a lean, whimsical smile.

"Thee seems to have a good deal of cheek," he reflected, as he emptied the mail-bag, "but thee 's certainly cheerful."

II.

Within a week every resident of Muscatel had heard the sound of Jerry Sullivan's voice. It arose above the ring of his

hammer as he worked at the pine skeleton of his shanty, and the sage-laden breeze from the mountains seemed a strange enough vehicle for the questionable sentiments of his song. New and startling variations of street songs, and other unfamiliar melodies came to Enoch's ears as he distributed the mail, or held the quart measure under the molasses barrel, and occasionally the singer himself dropped in to make a purchase and chat a few moments with the postmaster concerning the progress of his house.

"The architect has rather slopped over on the plans," he said, when the frame was up, "so I 'm putting up a Queen Anne wood-shed for the present, while he knocks a few bay windows out of the conservatory. 'A penny saved 's a penny earned,' you know. That 's the way I came to be a millionaire — stopped drinking in my infancy and learned to chew, saved a rattleful of nickels before I could walk — got any eighteen-carat nails, uncle? I want to do a little finishing-work in the bath-room."

Enoch met his new friend's trifling, always with the same gentle gravity; but some-

thing, perhaps that lurking liberality about the corners of his mouth, seemed to inspire the young fellow with implicit confidence in the old man's sympathy.

After the frame of Jerry's domicile was inclosed, a prodigious sawing and hammering went on inside the redwood walls, and the bursts of music were spasmodic, indicating a closer attention on the part of the workman to nicety of detail in his work. He called to Enoch as he was passing one day, and drew him inside the door mysteriously.

"Take a divan, uncle," he said airily, pushing a three-legged stool toward his guest. "I 've got something to show you, — something that 's been handed up to me from posterity. How does that strike you for a starter in the domestic business?"

He drew forward an empty soap-box, fashioned into an old-time cradle, and fitted with rude rockers at the ends.

"Happy thought — eh?" he rattled on, gleefully pointing to the stenciled end, where everything but "Pride of the Family" had been carefully erased. "How 's this for a proud prospective paternal?"

He balanced himself on one foot and rocked the little craft, with all its cargo of pathetic emptiness, gently to and fro.

Enoch's face quivered as if he had been stabbed.

The young fellow stepped back and surveyed his handiwork with jaunty satisfaction.

"I made that thing just as a bird builds its nest — by paternal instinct. It 's a little previous, and I 'd just as soon you would n't mention it; but I had to show it to somebody. Got any children?" he turned upon Enoch suddenly.

"No. Not any — living."

The old man's voice wavered, and caught itself on the last word.

Jerry thrust the cradle aside hastily.

"Neither have I, uncle, neither have I," he said; "not chick nor child. If you ain't too tired, let me show you over the house. I 'm sorry the elevator is n't running, so you could go up to the cupolo. This room 's a sort of e pluribus unum, many in one; kind of a boodwar and kitchen combined. The other rooms ain't inclosed yet, but they 're safe enough outside. That 's the advantage of this climate, you don't have to put every-

thing under cover. Ground-plan suit you pretty well?"

"I think thee 's very cosy," Enoch said, smiling gravely; "when does thee look for thy wife?"

"Just as soon as she 's able," said Jerry, drawing an empty nail-keg confidentially toward Enoch and seating himself; "you see" —

He stopped short. The cradle behind the old man was still rocking gently.

"I guess it won't be very long," he added indifferently.

III.

The south-bound train was late, and the few loafers who found their daily excitement in its arrival had drifted away as it grew dark, leaving no one but Enoch on the platform. When the train whistled the station agent opened the office door and his kerosene lamp sent a shaft of light out into the darkness.

There was the usual noisy banter among the trainmen, and none of them seemed to notice the woman who alighted from the platform of the passenger coach and came toward Enoch.

She stood in the light of the doorway, so that the old man could see her tawdry dress and the travel-dimmed red and white of her painted face.

"Is there a man named Jerry Sullivan livin' in this town?" she asked.

Enoch was conscious of a vague disappointment.

"Yes," he said, half reluctantly, "he lives here. I suppose thee 's his wife."

The woman looked at him curiously. Then she laughed.

"Yes, I suppose I am," she said; "can you show me where he lives?"

"I can't show thee very well in the dark, but it is n't far. If thee 'll wait a minute, I 'll take thy satchel and go with thee."

He brought the mail-bag and picked up the stranger's valise.

"Thy husband 's been looking for thee," he said, as they went along the path that led across a vacant lot to the street.

The woman did not reply at once. She seemed intent upon gathering her showy skirts out of the dust. When she spoke, her voice trembled on the verge of a laugh.

"That so? I 've been lookin' for him,

too. Thought I 'd give him a pleasant surprise."

"He 's got his house about finished."

The woman stopped in the path.

"His house," she sneered; "he must be rattled if he thinks I 'll live in a place like this — forty miles from nowhere."

They walked on in silence after that to the door of Jerry's shanty. There was a light inside, and the smell of cooking mingled with the resinous odor of the new lumber. Jerry was executing a difficult passage in a very light opera to the somewhat trying accompaniment of frying ham. The solo stopped abruptly when Enoch knocked.

"Come in," shouted the reckless voice of the singer, "let the good angels come in, come in!"

Enoch opened the door.

"Good-evening, Jerry," he said gravely; "here is thy wife."

The young fellow crossed the floor at a bound with a smile that stayed on his face after every vestige of joy had died out of it.

The woman gave him a coarse, triumphant stare.

"I heard you was lookin' for me," she

said, with a chuckle, "but you seemed kind o' s'prised after all."

Jerry stood perfectly still, with his hands at his sides. Behind him, where the light fell full upon it, Enoch could see the cradle. The old man placed the satchel on the step.

"I must go back and attend to the mail," he said, disappearing in the darkness.

A few hours later, just as Enoch had fitted the key in the store door and turned down the kerosene lamp, preparatory to blowing it out, Jerry appeared in the doorway.

"I 've got to go away on the early train," he said, in a dull, husky voice; "she 's going with me. I don't know how long I 'll be gone, and I thought I 'd like to leave the key of the house with you, if it won't be too much trouble."

"It won't be any trouble, Jerry. I 'll take care of it for thee," said Enoch.

The hand that held out the key seemed to Enoch to be stretched toward him across a chasm. He felt a yearning disgust for the man on the other side.

Jerry walked across the platform hesitatingly, and then came back.

"Would you mind locking up and coming outside, Mr. Embody?" he asked humbly; "I 'd like to have a little talk with you."

Enoch blew out the lamp and closed the door and locked it. He felt a physical shrinking from the moral squalor into which he was being dragged.

"What is it, Jerry?" he asked kindly.

"I 've been thinking," said the young man hurriedly, and in the same level, monotonous voice, "that families sometimes come to these new places without having any house ready, and of course it 's a good deal of expense for them to board, and I just wanted to say to you that if any person — well, say a widow with a b— family — I would n't care to help a man that could rustle for himself — but a woman, you know, if she 's not very strong, and has a — a — family — why, I 'd just as soon you 'd let her have the house, and you need n't say anything about the rent: I 'll fix that when I come back. I have n't been to church and put anything in the collection since I 've been here," — his voice gave a suggestion of the old ring, and then fell back drearily, —

"so I thought I 'd hand you what I 'd saved up, and you can use it for charitable purposes — groceries and little things that people might need, coming in without anything to start."

He handed Enoch a roll of money, and the old man put it into his pocket.

"I 'll remember what thee says, Jerry. If any worthy family comes along, I 'll see that they do not want."

"If I can, I 'll send you a little now and then," the young fellow went on more cheerfully, "but I 'd just as soon you would n't mention it. I 'll be back sometime, there 's no doubt about that, but I can't say just when. You can tell the folks that my — my wife," he choked on the word, "did n't feel satisfied here. She thinks it won't agree with her. And I guess it won't, she 's very bad off" — he turned away lingeringly, and then came back. "About the — the — crib," he faltered, "if they happen to have a baby, I would n't mind them using it. Babies are pretty generally respectable, no matter what their folks are. I *was* calculating," he went on wistfully, "to get another box and hunt up some wheels, and I

thought maybe they could rig it up with a pink parasol and use it to cart the baby 'round; you know if a woman is n't very strong, it might save her a good deal — but then it 's too late now;" he turned away hopelessly.

"I guess I can manage that for thee, Jerry," said Enoch; "I 'm rather handy with tools. Thee need n't worry."

The two men stood still a moment in the moonlight.

"Good-by, Mr. Embody," said Jerry.

He did not put out his hand. Enoch hesitated a little.

"Farewell," he said, and his voice was not quite natural.

The next morning, when Enoch opened the outside letter-box to postmark the mail that had been dropped into it after the store was closed the night before, he found but one letter. It was addressed to Mrs. Josie Hart Sullivan, Pikeboro, Mo.

## IV.

"Are you the postmaster?"

Enoch dropped the tin scoop into the sugar-bin, and turned around. The voice

was timid, almost appealing, and Enoch glanced from the pale, girlish face that confronted him to the bundle in her arms.

There was no mistaking the bundle. It was of that peculiar bulky shapelessness which betokens a very small infant.

"Yes, I 'm the postmaster," answered Enoch kindly; "is there anything I can do for thee?"

The young creature looked down, and a faint color came into her transparent face.

"I 've just come in on the train," she faltered. "I thought you might be able to tell me where to go. I have n't very much money. I was sick on the way, and spent more than I expected. I — I" — she hesitated, and glanced at Enoch with a little expectant gasp.

"Is thee alone?" inquired the old man.

"Yes. That is — only Baby. My husband has just — just" — her voice fluttered and died away helplessly.

"Oh, thee 's a widow," said Enoch gently.

"Yes." The poor young thing looked up with a smile of wistful gratitude. "I 'm not very strong. I heard this was a healthy

place. They thought it would be good for us — Baby and me. I'm Mrs. Josie Hart. Baby's name is Gerald."

"Would thee be afraid to stay in a house alone?" inquired Enoch thoughtfully.

The stranger gave him a look of gentle surprise.

"Why, no, of course not — not with Baby; he's so much company."

There was a note of profound compassion for his masculine ignorance in her young voice.

The old man's mouth quivered into a smile. He went to the back of the room, and took a key from a nail.

"I think I can find thee a real cosy little place," he said; "shan't I carry the baby for thee?"

She hesitated, and looked up into his solemn, kindly face. Then she held the precious bundle toward him.

"I guess I'll have to let you. I did n't really know it till I got here, but I begin to feel, oh! so awful tired," she said, with a long, sighing breath, as Enoch folded his gaunt arms about the baby.

They went up the street together, and

Enoch unlocked Jerry's house and showed the stranger in. She walked straight across the room to the cradle. When she turned around her eyes were swimming.

"Oh, I think it's just *lovely* here," she said; "I feel better already. This is such a nice little house, and so many wild flowers everywhere, and they smell so sweet — I *know* Baby will like it."

She relieved Enoch of his burden and laid it on the bed.

The old man lingered a little.

"Thee need n't worry about provisions or anything," he said hesitatingly; "some of the neighbors will come in and help thee get started. Thee 'll want to rest now. I guess I 'll be going."

"Oh, you must n't go without seeing Baby!" insisted the young mother, beginning to unswathe the shapeless bundle on the bed.

Enoch moved nearer, and waited until the tiny crumpled bud of a face appeared among the wrappings.

"*Is n't* he sweet?" pleaded the girl rapturously.

Enoch bent over and gazed into the quaint little sleeping countenance.

"He 's a very nice baby," he said, with gentle emphasis.

"And *so* good," the girl-voice rippled on; "he never cried but once on the way out here, and that time I did n't blame him one bit; I wanted to cry myself, — we were so hot and tired and dusty. But he sleeps — oh, the way he *does* sleep. There! did you notice him smile? I think he knows my voice. He often smiles that way when I am talking to him."

She caught him out of his loosened sheath and held him against her breast with the look on her face that has baffled the art of so many centuries.

It was thus that Enoch remembered her as he went down the street to the store.

"I would have taken her right home to Rachel," he said to himself, "but women folks sometimes ask a good many unnecessary questions, and the poor thing is tired."

## V.

So the little widow and her baby became the wards of the town of Muscatel. After one or two unsuccessful attempts to learn the particulars of her husband's last illness, the good women of the place decided that

her bereavement was too recent to be made a subject of conversation.

The baby, on the contrary, being a topic all the more absorbing by reason of its newness, they held long and enthusiastic conferences with the young mother concerning his care, clothing, and diet. With that gentle receptivity which makes some natures the defenseless targets of advice, the inefficient little mother felt herself at times between the upper and the nether millstones of condensed milk and Caudle's food, but her weak, appealing face always brightened into tremulous delight when the rival factions united, as they invariably did, on the subject of the baby's undoubted precocity in the matter of "noticing."

Enoch was called in many times to give counsel which seemed to gain from his masculinity what it might be supposed to lack by reason of his ignorance concerning the ailments and accomplishments of the small stranger who held the heart of the community in his tiny purple fist. It was to Enoch that the young mother brought her small woes, and it was with Enoch that she left them.

The song of the hay-balers and the whir of the threshing-machine had died out of the valley, and the raisin-making had come on. The trays were spread in the vineyards, and the warm white air was filled with the fruity smell of the grapes, browning and sweetening beneath the October sun.

One drowsy afternoon Enoch was in the back room of the store, weighing barley and marking the weight on the sacks. Suddenly there was a quick step, and a voice in the outer room, and the old man turned slowly, with the brush in his hand, and confronted a man in the doorway.

"Jerry!"

"Yes, uncle, here I am; slightly disfigured, but still in the ring. How's the market? Long on barley, I see. I" — he broke off suddenly, and assumed an air of the deepest dejection. "I 've had a great deal of trouble since I saw you, uncle. I 've lost my wife."

He turned to the window and pretended to look through the cobwebbed glass.

"She went off very sudden, but she was conscious to the last."

Enoch stood still and slowly stirred the

paint in the paint-pot until his companion turned and caught the glance of his keen blue eye.

"Does thee think she will stay lost, Jerry?" he asked quietly.

The young fellow came close to Enoch's side.

"You bet," he said, with low, husky intensity; "the law settled that. She was a cursed fraud anyway," he went on, with hurrying wrath; "she ran away with — I thought she was dead — I 'll swear by" —

"Thee need n't swear, Jerry," interrupted Enoch quietly; "if thy word is good for nothing, thy blasphemy will not help it any."

The young man's face relaxed. There was a little silence.

"Has thee been up to thy house?" asked Enoch presently.

"Yes, yes," said Jerry lightly; "I dropped right in on the family circle. The widow seems to be a nice, tidy little person, and the kid — did you ever see anything to beat that kid, uncle?"

Enoch had been appealed to on this subject before.

"He 's a very nice baby," he said gravely.

"They seem to be settled rather comfortably, and I guess I 'll get a tent and pitch it on some of these vacant lots, and not disturb them. The little woman is n't really well enough to move, and besides, the kid might kick if he had to give up the cradle; perfect fit, is n't it?"

"Enoch," said Rachel Embody to her husband, as they drove their flea-bitten gray mare to the Friends' meeting on First Day, "what does thee think of Jerry Sullivan and the widow Hart marrying as they did? Does n't thee think it was a little sudden for both of them?"

Enoch slapped the lines on the gray's callous back.

"I don't know, Rachel," he said; "there are some subjects which I do not find profitable for reflection."

## EM.

### I.

Mrs. Wickersham helped her son from his bed to a chair on the porch, and spread a patchwork quilt over his knees when he was seated.

"Don't you want something to put your feet on, Benny?" she asked anxiously, with that hunger for servitude with which women persecute their male sick.

The invalid looked down at his feet helplessly, and then turned his eyes toward the stretch of barley-stubble below the vineyard. A stack of baled hay in the middle of the field cast a dense black shadow in the afternoon sun.

"No, I guess not," he said absently. "Has Lawson sent any word about the hay?"

"He said he'd come and look at it in a day or two."

Mrs. Wickersham stood behind her son, smoothing the loose wrinkles from his coat with her hard hand. He was scarcely more

than a boy, and his illness had given him that pathetic gauntness which comes from the wasting away of youth and untried strength.

"I wanted a little money before the twenty-fourth," he said, feeling one feverish hand with the other awkwardly. "I can't seem to get used to being sick. I thought sure I'd be ready for the hay-baling."

"The doctor says you're doing real well, Benny," asserted the woman bravely. "I guess if it ain't very much you want, we can manage it."

"It's only five dollars."

Mrs. Wickersham went back to the kitchen and resumed her dish-washing. Her daughter came out of the pantry where she had been putting away the cups. She was taller than her mother, and looked down at her with patronizing deference.

"Do you think that new medicine's helping Ben any?" she asked in an undertone.

"Oh, I don't know, Emmy," the poor woman broke out desperately; "sometimes I think his cough's a little looser, but he's getting to have that same look about the eyes that your pa had that last winter"—

Mrs. Wickersham left her work abruptly, and went and stood in the doorway with her back toward her daughter.

The girl took up her mother's deserted task, and went on with it soberly.

"Shall I put on some potatoes for yeast?" she asked, after a little heart-breaking silence.

"Yes, I guess you'd better," answered the older woman; "there's only the best part of a loaf left, and Benny had n't ought to eat fresh bread."

She came back to her work, catching eagerly at the homely suggestion of duty.

"I 'll finish them," she said, taking a dish out of her daughter's hand; "you brighten up the fire and get the potatoes."

The girl walked away without looking up. When she came into the room a little later with an armful of wood, Mrs. Wickersham was standing by the stove.

"Emmy," she said in a whisper, taking hold of her daughter's dress and drawing her toward her, "don't tell your brother I had to pay cash to the balers. It took all the ready money I had in the house: I 'd rather he did n't know it."

"What 's the matter, mother?" asked the girl, looking steadily into the older woman's worried face.

"He wants five dollars next week," whispered Mrs. Wickersham, nodding toward the door; "I hain't got it."

The girl threw the wood into the woodbox and stood gazing intently at it. She had a quaint, oval face, and the smooth folds of her dark hair made a triangle of her high forehead. Two upright lines formed themselves in the triangle as she gazed. She turned away without speaking, and took a pan from the shelf and went into the shed-room for potatoes. When she came back, she walked to her mother's side, and said in a low voice, —

"You need n't worry about the money any more, mother. I 'll get it for Ben."

"*You*, Em!"

"Yes; I 'm going over to Bassett's raisin-camp to pick grapes."

"Oh, I don't think I 'd do *that*, Emmy!"

"Why, what 's wrong about it?"

"There 's nothing wrong about it, of course; I did n't mean that. Only it seems so — so kind of strange. None of the women

folks in our family 's ever done anything of that kind."

"Then the women folks in our family will have to begin. I can get a dollar a day. The Burnham girls went, and they 're as good as we are. I 'm going, anyway," — the girl's red lips shut themselves in a narrow line.

"Oh, they 're all *good* enough, Emmy," protested Mrs. Wickersham; "it 's nothing against them, only it 's going out to work. You know the way men folks feel — I don't know what your brother will say."

"You can tell him I 've set my heart on it. They have great fun over there. He wanted me to go camping to the beach with the same crowd of young folks this summer. I 'll not stay at night, mother; I 'll walk home every evening. It 's no use saying anything, I 'm going."

"Is Steve Elliott at the camp?" asked Benny, when his mother told him.

"She did n't say anything about him, Benny, but I suppose he is. Why?"

"I guess that explains it," said the invalid, smiling wistfully.

II.

Nearly every available grape-picker in the little valley was at Bassett's vineyard. There was a faint murmur of surprise when Em walked into the camp on Monday morning.

"I thought you were n't coming, Em," said Irene Burnham, curving her smooth, sunburned neck away from the tall young fellow who stood beside her.

"I changed my mind," said Em quietly.

"It 's awful hot work," giggled Irene, "and I always burn so; I wish I tanned. But I 'm going to hold out the rest of this week, if I burn to a cinder."

"'Rene 's after a new parasol," announced her brother teasingly; "she 's bound to save her complexion if it takes the skin off."

The young people gave a little shout of delight, and straggled down the aisles of the vineyard. The thick growth had fallen away from the gnarled trunks of the vines, and the grapes hung in yellowing clusters to the warm, sun-dried earth. The trays were scattered in uneven rows on the plowed ground between the vines, their burden turn-

ing to sweetened amber in the sunshine. The air was heavy with the rich, fruity ferment of the grapes. Bees were beginning to drone among the trays. The mountains which hemmed in the little valley were a deep, velvety blue in the morning light. Em looked at them with a new throb in her heart. She did not care what was beyond them as she walked between the tangled vine-rows. Stephen Elliott had left Irene, and walked beside her. The valley was wide enough for Em's world, — a girl's world, which is hemmed in by mountains always, and always narrow.

As the day advanced the gay calls of the grape-harvesters grew more and more infrequent. The sky seemed to fade in the glare of the sun to a pale, whitish blue. Buzzards reeled through the air, as if drunken with sunlight. The ashen soil of the vineyard burned Em's feet and dazzled her eyes. She stood up now and then and looked far down the valley where the yellow barley-stubble shimmered off into haze. As she looked, something straightened her lips into a resolute line and sent her back to her work with softened eyes.

"Do you get very tired, Em?" her brother asked, as she sat in the doorway at nightfall.

The girl leaned her head against the casement as if to steady her weary voice.

"Not very," she said slowly and gravely; "it's a little warm at noon, but I don't mind it."

"I thought sure I 'd be up by this time," fretted the invalid, the yearning in his heart that pain could not quench turning his sympathy to envy.

"The doctor says you're getting on real well, Ben," said Em steadily.

The young fellow looked down at his wasted hands, gray and ghostly in the twilight.

"Was 'Rene there?" he asked.

"Yes."

"It isn't like having your sister go out to work, Benny," said Mrs. Wickersham soothingly; "just the neighbors, and real nice folks, too. I would n't fret about it."

On Wednesday morning, as Em neared the camp, she saw the grape-pickers gathered in a little group before the girls'

tent. Steve Elliott separated himself from the crowd, and came to meet her.

"We 've struck, Em," he said, smiling down at her from the shadow of his big hat.

"Who 's we?" asked Em gravely.

"All of us. They 're paying a dollar and a quarter over at Briggs's; we ain't a-goin' to stand it."

Em had stopped in the path. The young fellow stepped behind her, and she went on.

"Why don't you all go over to Briggs's and go to work?" she asked, without turning her head.

"Too far — the foreman 'll come to time."

They came up to the noisy group, and Em seated herself on a pile of trays and loosened the strings of her wide hat; she was tired from her walk, and the pallor of her face made her lips seem redder.

Irene Burnham crossed over to the newcomer, shrugging herself with girlish self-consciousness.

"Is n't it just too mean, Em?" she panted; "I know they 'll discharge us. That means good-by to my new parasol; I've been dying for one all summer, a red silk one" —

"Let up on the parasol racket, Sis,"

called one of the Burnham boys; "business is business."

The hum of the young voices went on, mingled with gay, irresponsible laughter. Em got up and began to tie her hat.

"Where are you going?" asked one of the girls.

"I 'm going to work."

"To work! why, we 've struck!"

"I have n't," said Em soberly. "I 'm willing to work for a dollar a day."

There was a little cry of dismay from the girls; Steve Elliott's tanned face flushed a coppery red.

"You ain't goin' back on us, Em?" he said angrily.

"I ain't going back on my word," answered the girl; "you need n't work if you don't want to; this is a free country."

"It is n't, though," said Ike Burnham; "the raisin men have a ring — there 's no freedom where there 's rings."

"I suppose they go into them because they want to," said Em, setting her lips.

"They go into them because they 'd get left if they did n't."

"Well, if I was a raisin man," persisted

the girl quietly, "and wanted to go into a ring, I'd do it; but if anybody undertook to boss me into it, they'd have the same kind of a contract on hand that you've got." She turned her back on the little group and started toward the vineyard.

Irene had drifted toward Steve Elliott's side and was smiling expectantly up into his bronzed face. He broke away from her glance and strode after the retreating figure.

"Em!" The girl turned quickly.

"Oh, Steve!" she cried, with a pleading sob in her voice.

"Em, you're making a fool of yourself!" he broke out cruelly.

The curve in the red lips straightened.

"Let me alone!" she gasped, putting up her hand to her throat. "If I'm to be made a fool of, I'd rather do it myself. I guess I can stand it, if you'll let me alone!"

III.

When Bassett's foreman rode into the vineyard at noon to talk with the strikers, he saw a wide brown hat moving slowly among the vine-rows.

"Who's that?" he asked, pointing with his whip.

"Em Wickersham," said one of the group sullenly.

The foreman turned his horse's head, and galloped down the furrow.

"Miss Wickersham."

Em straightened herself, and pushed back her hat.

"You don't want to give up your job?"

The girl shaded her eyes with her hand. There was an unsteady movement of her chin before she spoke.

"I 'd like to work till Friday night," she said.

"Well, I 'd like to keep you; but I don't know how it will be. I won't stand any of their nonsense," — he jerked his head toward the camp; "I 'm going to send over to Aliso Cañon for a wagon-load of pickers. I 'm pretty certain I can get them, but they 'll all be men; you might find it a little unpleasant."

"Who are they?" asked Em.

"Only a lot of ranchers picked up over the neighborhood," said the foreman. "I think I can find enough men and boys who are through harvesting. I 'll try anyway."

"Will you be here all the time?" asked the girl.

"All of to-morrow and most of Friday," he answered, wondering a little.

"Well, I guess if you don't care, I'll stay; I guess they won't hurt me," — the wraith of a smile flitted across her face.

"All right." The foreman urged his horse forward.

"The Wickershams must be hard pressed," he said to himself; "the girl looks pale. Confound those young rascals!"

Across at the camp Em could hear laughter and snatches of song. The soft rustle of the grape-leaves in the tepid breeze seemed to emphasize the stillness about her. Now and then a quail, tilting its queer little crest, scurried across the furrows and whirred out of sight. Pink-footed doves ran along the edge of the vineyard, mourning plaintively. The girl worked on without faltering, looking down the valley now and then through a blur that was not haze, and seeing always something there that dulled the pain of her loneliness.

The day wore on. Em had eaten her lunch alone, in the shadow of the cypress

hedge. As the afternoon advanced and the sea-breeze wandered over the mountains in fitful gusts, the campers trooped homeward, still laughing and calling to each other with reckless shouts. Em straightened her aching limbs, and watched them as they went. 'Rene's pink dress fluttered close to the tallest form among them, loitering a little, and standing out in silhouette against the afternoon sky at the end of the straggling procession as it disappeared over the hilltop.

IV.

It was Friday evening, and Em laid five silver dollars on the kitchen table beside her mother.

"You can give that to Ben," she said wearily.

Mrs. Wickersham glanced from the money to her daughter's dusty shoes, and set, colorless face.

"Emmy, I 'm afraid you 've overdone," she said with a start.

"No, I have n't," answered the girl without flinching; "it 's been a little hard yesterday and to-day, and I 'm tired, that 's all. Don't tell Ben."

"Are you too tired to go to the church sociable this evening?" pursued the mother anxiously.

"Yes, I believe I am."

"I saw Steve Elliott and 'Rene Burnham driving that way a few minutes ago. I thought they was over at the camp." Mrs. Wickersham had resumed her work and had her back toward her daughter.

"They were n't there to-day," said Em listlessly.

"Does she go with him much?"

There was a rising resentment in Mrs. Wickersham's voice. Em glanced at her anxiously.

"I don't know," she faltered.

"I don't see how she can act so!" the older woman broke out indignantly.

The girl's face turned a dull white; she opened her lips to breathe.

"I used to think she liked Benny," Mrs. Wickersham went on, speaking in a heated undertone. "I should think she 'd be ashamed of herself."

Em's voice came back.

"I don't believe Ben cares, mother," she said soothingly.

"I don't care if he does n't, she 'd ought to," urged Mrs. Wickersham, with maternal logic.

There was a sound of strained, ineffectual coughing in the front room. Mrs. Wickersham left her work and hurried away. When she came back Em was sitting on the doorstep with her forehead in her hands.

"Benny 's got a notion he could drive over to the store to-morrow," her mother began excitedly; "he 's got something in his head. He thinks if Joe Atkinson would bring their low buggy — I 'm sure I don't know what to say;" the poor woman's voice trembled with responsibility.

Em got up with a quick, decisive movement.

"Don't say anything, mother. If Ben wants to go, he 's got to go. I 'll run over to Atkinson's right away."

Mrs. Wickersham caught her daughter's arm.

"No, no; not to-night. He said in the morning, He must be better, don't you think so, Emmy?" she pleaded.

"Of course," said Em fiercely. Then she turned and fastened a loosened hairpin in

her mother's disordered hair. Even a caress wore its little mask of duty with Em. "Of course he 's better, mother," she said more gently.

V.

It was Sunday, and the little valley was still with the stillness of warm, drowsy, quiescent life. At noon, the narrow road stretching between the shadowless barley-fields was haunted by slender, hurrying spirals of dust, like phantoms tempted by the silence to a wild frolic in the sunlight. The white air shimmered in wavy lines above the stubble. Em shut her eyes as she came out of the little church, as if the glare blinded her. Steve was waiting near the door, and a sudden, unreasoning hope thrilled her heart. He was looking for some one. She could hear the blood throbbing in her temples. He took a step forward. Then a red silken cloud shut out her sun, and the riot died out of her poor young heart. 'Rene was smiling up into his sunburned face from the roseate glory of her new parasol. Em walked home through the sunlight with the echo of their banter humming in her ears.

Ben sat on the porch watching for her, a feverish brightness in his sunken eyes.

"Was 'Rene at church?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes, Ben."

Em stood behind his chair, looking down at the cords of his poor, wasted neck. Her eyelids burned with hot, unshed tears.

"Did she look nice — did she have anything new?"

"Yes, she had a new parasol. She looked real pretty." The girl spoke with dull, unfeeling gentleness. Ben tried to turn and look up into her face.

"She 's been wanting it all summer. I told her 'way long in the spring that I 'd get it for her birthday. I wonder if she forgot it? I did n't have any idea I 'd be laid up this way."

Em stood perfectly still.

"I 'll bet she was surprised, Em," he went on wistfully; "do you think she 'll come over and say anything about it?"

"She 'd better," said Em, setting her teeth in her bright under lip.

The invalid gave a little, choking cough, and looked out across the valley. A red

spot was moving through the stubble toward the house. He put up his hot hand and laid it on Em's cold fingers.

"Mother tried to fool me about the money," he said feebly, "but I think I know where she got it. I don't mean to forget it either, Em. I'll pay it back just as soon as I get up."

"Yes, Ben."

The girl dropped her cheek on his head with a little wailing sob.

"Yes, Ben, I ain't a bit afraid about my pay." Then she slipped her hand from under his and went into the house.

The red spot was drawing nearer. Mrs. Wickersham glanced through the open window at her son.

"Benny's looking brighter than I 've seen him in a long time," she thought. "I guess his ride yesterday done him good."

And in her little room Em sat on the edge of the bed, staring at the wall through blinding tears.

"I wish I had it all to do over again," she said. "I 'd do it all — even if I knew — for Ben!"

## COLONEL BOB JARVIS.

### I.

We were sojourning between Anaheim and the sea. There was a sunshiny dullness about the place, like the smiles of a vapid woman. The bit of vineyard surrounding our whitewashed cabin was an emerald set in the dull, golden-brown plain. Before the door an artesian well glittered in the sun like an inverted crystal bowl. Esculapius called the spot Fezzan, and gradually I came to think the well a fountain, and the sunburnt waste about us a stretch of yellow sand.

When I had walked to the field of whispering corn behind the house, and through the straggling vines to the edge of the vineyard in front, I came back to where my invalid sat beneath the feathery acacias, dreaming in happy lonesomeness.

"Did you ever see such placid, bright, ethereal stillness?" I asked.

Esculapius took his cigar from his lips and looked at me pensively.

"It may be my misfortune, I hope it is not my fault, but I do not remember to have seen stillness of any sort."

Esculapius has but one shortcoming — he is not a poet. I never wound him by appearing to notice this defect, so I sat down on the dry burr-clover and made no reply.

"You think it is still," he went on in a mannish, instructive way, "but in fact there are a thousand sounds. At night, when it is really quiet, you will hear the roar of the ocean ten miles away. Hark!"

Our host was singing far down in the corn. He was a minister, a deep-toned Methodist, brimming over with vocal piety.

> "Nearer the great white throne,
> Nearer the jasper sea," —

came to us in slow, rich cadences.

The fern-like branches above us stirred softly against the blue. Little aromatic whiffs came from the grove of pale eucalyptus-trees near the house. Esculapius diluted the intoxicating air with tobacco smoke and remained sane, but as for me the

sunshine went to my head, and whirled and eddied there like some Eastern drug.

"My love," I said wildly, "if we stay here very long and nothing happens, I shall do something rash."

The next morning a huge derrick frowned in the dooryard, and a picturesque group of workmen lounged under the acacias. The well had ceased to flow.

Esculapius called me to a corner of the piazza, and spoke in low, hurried tones.

"Something has happened," he said; "the well has stopped. I thought it might relieve your feelings to get off that quotation about the golden bowl and the wheel, and the pitcher, and the fountain, etc.; then, if it is safe to leave you, I would like to go hunting."

I looked at him with profound compassion.

"I have forgotten the quotation," I said, "but I think it begins: 'The grinders shall cease because they are few.' Perhaps you had better take your shotgun, and don't forget your light overcoat. Good-by."

Then I took a pitcher and went down the walk to the disglorified well. The mu-

sical drip on the pebbles was hushed; the charm of our oasis had departed. In its place stood a length of rusty pipe full of standing water. Some bits of maiden's-hair I had placed in reach of the cool spray yesterday were already withered in the sun. I took the gourd from its notch in the willows sadly. Some one had been before me and carved "Ichabod" on its handle. I filled my pitcher and turned to go. A tall form separated itself from the group of workmen and came gallantly forward.

"Madame," said a rich, hearty voice, "if you 'll just allow me, I 'll tackle that pitcher and tote it in for you. Jarvis is my name, Colonel Bob Jarvis, well-borer. We struck a ten-inch flow down at Scranton's last week, and rather knocked the bottom out of things around here."

"But the pitcher is n't at all heavy, Colonel Jarvis."

"Oh, never mind that: anything 's too heavy for a lady; that 's my sentiments. You see, I 'm a ladies' man, — born and brought up to it. Nursed my mother and two aunts and a grandmother through consumption, and never let one of 'em lift a

finger. 'Robert,' my mother used to say, in her thin, sickly voice, 'Robert, be true to God and the women;' and, by godfrey, I mean to be."

I relinquished the pitcher instantly. Esculapius was right; something had happened. The well was gone, but in its place I had found something a thousand times more refreshing. When my husband returned, he found me sitting breathless and absorbed under the acacias.

"Hush!" I said, with upraised finger; "listen!"

Our host and the colonel were talking as they worked at the well.

"We 've had glorious meetings this week over at Gospel Swamp, Jarvis," the minister was saying. "I looked for you every night. If you could just come over and hear the singing, and have some of the good brothers and sisters pray with you, don't you think"—

"Why, God bless your soul, man!" interrupted the colonel; "don't you know I 'm religious? I 'm with you right along, as to first principles, that is; but, you see, I can't quite go the Methodist doctrine. I

was raised a Presbyterian, you know, — regular black-and-blue Calvinist, — and what a fellow takes in with his mother's milk sticks by him. I 'm attached to the old ideas, — infant damnation, and total depravity, and infernal punishment, and the interference of the saints. You fellows over at the Swamp are loose! Why, by — the way, my mother used to say to me, in her delicate, squeaky voice: 'Robert, beware of Methodists; they 're loose, my son, loose as a bag of bones.' No, *indeed*, I would n't want you to think me indifferent to religion; religion 's my forte. Why, by — and by, I mean to start a Presbyterian church right here under your nose."

"I 'm glad of it," responded the minister warmly; "you 've no idea how glad I am, Jarvis."

"Why, man alive, that church is in my mind day and night. I want to get about forty good, pious Presbyterian families to settle around here, and I 'll bore wells for 'em, and talk up the church business between times. You saw me carrying that lady's pitcher for her this morning, did n't you? Well, by — the way, that was a reli-

gious move entirely. I took her man for a Presbyterian preacher the minute I struck the ranch; maybe it 's poor health gives him that cadaverous look, but you can't most always tell. More likely it 's religion. At any rate" —

Esculapius retreated in wild disorder, and did not appear again until supper-time. When that meal was finished, Colonel Jarvis followed me as I walked to the piazza.

"If it ain't presuming, madam," he said confidentially, "I 'd like to ask your advice. I take it you 're from the city, now?"

"Yes," I answered, with preternatural gravity; "what makes you think so?"

"Well, I knew it by your gait, mostly. A woman that 's raised in the country walks as if she was used to havin' the road to herself; city women are generally good steppers. But that ain't the point. I 'm engaged to be married!"

My composure under this announcement was a good deal heightened by the fact that Esculapius, who had sauntered out after us, whistling to himself, became suddenly quiet, and disappeared tumultuously.

"Engaged to be married!" I said. "Let

me congratulate you, Colonel. May I hope to see the fortunate young lady?"

"That depends. You see, I'm in a row, — the biggest kind of a row, by — a good deal; and I thought you might give me a lift. She's a 'Frisco lady, you know; one of your regular high-flyers; black eyes, bangs, no end o' spirit. You see, she was visitin' over at Los Nietos, and we made it up, and when she went back to 'Frisco I thought I'd send her a ring; so I bought this," fumbling in his pocket, and producing the most astounding combination of red glass and pinchbeck; "and, by godfrey! she sent it back to me. Now, I don't see anything wrong about that ring; do you?"

"It is certainly a little — well, peculiar, at least, for an engagement ring; perhaps she would like something a trifle less showy. Ladies have a great many whims about jewelry, you know."

"Exactly. That is just what I reflected. So I went and bought *this*" (triumphantly displaying a narrow band); "now that's what I call genteel; don't you? Well, if you 'll believe it, she sent that back, too, by — return mail. I wish I'd fetched you the

letter she wrote; if it was n't the spiciest piece of literature I ever read by — anybody. 'She 'd have me understand she was n't a barmaid nor a Quaker; and if I did n't know what was due a lady in her position, I 'd better find out before I aspired to her hand,' *et cetery*. Oh, I tell you, she 's grit; no end o' mettle. So, you see, I 've struck a boulder, and it gets me bad, because I meant to see the parson through with his well here, and then go on to 'Frisco and get married. Now, if you 'll help me through, and get me into sand and gravel again, and your man decides to settle in these parts, I 'll guarantee you a number one well, good, even two-inch flow, and no expense but pipe and boardin' hands. I 'll do it, by — some means."

"Oh, no, Colonel," I said, struggling with a laugh; "I could n't allow that. It gives me great pleasure to advise you, only it 's a very delicate matter, you know — and — really" (I was casting about wildly for an inspiration) "would n't it be better to go on to the city, as you intended, and ask the lady to go with you and exercise her own taste in selecting a ring?"

My companion took a step backward, folded his arms, and looked at me admiringly.

"Well, if it don't beat all how a woman walks through a millstone! Now that's what I call neat. Why, God bless you, madam, I've been boring at that thing for a week steady, night and day, by — myself, and making no headway. It makes me think of my mother. 'Robert,' she used to say (and she had a very small, trembly voice), — 'Robert, a woman's little finger weighs more than a man's whole carcass;' and she was right. I 'll be — destroyed if she was n't right!"

Esculapius laughed rather unnecessarily when I repeated this conversation to him.

"I am willing to allow that it 's funny," I said; "but after all there is a rude pathos in the man, an untutored chivalry. Nearly every man loves and reverences a woman; but this man loves and reverences women. It is old-fashioned, I know, but it has a breezy sweetness of its own, like the lavender and rosemary of our grandmothers; don't you think so?"

There was no reply. I imagine that Es-

culapius is sensible at times of his want of ideality, and feels a delicacy in conversing with me. So I went on musingly: —

"With such natures love is an instinct; and it is to instinct, after all, that we must look for everything that is fresh and poetic in humanity. We have all made this sacrifice to culture, — a sacrifice of force to expression. Is n't it so, my love?"

Still no reply.

"I like to picture to myself the affection of which such a man is capable, for no doubt he loves this girl of whom he speaks; not, of course, as you — as you *ought* to love me, but with a rude, wild sincerity, a sort of rugged grandeur. Imagine him betrayed by her. A man of the world might grow white about the lips and sick at heart, but he would find relief in cynicism and bitter words. This man would *act*, — some wild, strange act of vengeance. The cultured nature is a honeycomb: his is a solid mass; and masses give us our most picturesque effects. Don't you think so, my dear?"

And still no reply.

"Esculapius!"

"Well, my love?"

"Is n't it barbarous of you not to answer when I speak to you?"

"Possibly; at least it has that appearance, but there are mitigating circumstances, my dear. I was asleep."

II.

Two weeks later the colonel brought his wife to call upon me. She was a showy, loud-voiced blonde, resplendently over-dressed. At the first opportunity her husband motioned me aside.

"Is n't she about the gayest piece of calico you ever saw?" he asked, with proud confidence. "Does n't she lay over anything around here by a large majority?"

"She is certainly a very striking woman," I said gravely, "and one who does you great credit. But I am a little surprised, Colonel. No doubt it was a mistake, but I got the impression in some way that the lady was a brunette."

The colonel's countenance fell. "Now, look here," he said, after a little reflection; "I don't mind telling you, because you 're up to the city ways and you 'll understand.

The fact is, this *is n't the one.* You see, I went on to 'Frisco as you advised, and planked down a check for five hundred dollars the minute I got there. 'Now,' said I, 'Bob Jarvis don't do things by halves; just you take that money, my girl, and get yourself a ring that 's equal to the occasion. I don't care if it 's a cluster of solitary diamonds as big as a section of well-pipe.' Now, I call that square, don't you? Well, God bless your soul, madam, if she did n't take that money and skip out with another fellow! Some white-livered city sneak — beggin' your husband's pardon — who 'd been hangin' around for a year or more. Of course I was stuck when I heard of it. It was this one told me. She 's her sister. I could see that she felt bad about it. 'It was a nasty, dirty trick,' she said; and I 'll be — demoralized if I don't think so myself, and said so at the time. But, after all, it turned out a lucky thing for me. Now look at that, will you?"

I followed his gaze of admiring fondness to where Mrs. Jarvis was, bridling and simpering under Esculapius's compliments.

"Is n't she a nosegay? But don't you

be jealous, madam; she 's just wrapped up in me, and constant," he added, shaking his head reflectively; "why, bless your soul, she 's as constant as sin."

When I told Esculapius of this he sighed deeply.

"What is the matter?" I asked, with some anxiety.

He threw back his head and sent a little dreamy cloud of smoke up through the acacias.

"I was thinking," he said, pensively, "what a 'wild, strange act of vengeance' it was!"

I looked him sternly in the eye. "My dear," I said, "I don't think you ought to distress yourself about that. I never should have reminded you of it. You were dreaming, you know, and you are not responsible for what you dream. Besides, dreams are like human nature, they always go by contraries."

# BRICE.

## I.

He came up the mountain road at nightfall, urging his lean mustang forward wearily, and coughing now and then — a heavy, hollow cough that told its own story.

There were only two houses on the mesa stretching shaggy and sombre with greasewood from the base of the mountains to the valley below, — two unpainted redwood dwellings, with their clumps of trailing pepper-trees and tattered bananas, — mere specks of civilization against a stern background of mountain-side. The traveler halted before one of them, bowing awkwardly as the master of the house came out.

"Mr. Brandt, I reckon."

Joel Brandt looked up into the stranger's face. Not a bad face, certainly: sallow and drawn with suffering, — one of those hopelessly pathetic faces, barely saved from the grotesque by a pair of dull, wistful eyes.

Not that Joel Brandt saw anything either grotesque or pathetic about the man.

"Another sickly looking stranger outside, Barbara, wants to try the air up here. Can you keep him? Or maybe the Fox's 'll give him a berth."

Mrs. Brandt shook her head in a housewifely meditation.

"No; Mrs. Fox can't, that 's certain. She has an asthma and two bronchitises there now. What 's the matter with him, Joel?"

The stranger's harsh, resonant cough answered.

"Keep him? — to be sure. You might know I 'd keep him, Joel; the night air 's no place for a man to cough like that. Bring him into the kitchen right away."

The newcomer spread his bony hands over Mrs. Brandt's cheery fire, and the soft, dull eyes followed her movements wistfully.

"The fire feels kind o' homey, ma'am; Californy ain't much of a place for fires, it 'pears."

"Been long on the coast, stranger?" Joel squared himself interrogatively.

"'Bout a week. I 'm from Indianny.

Brice 's my name — Posey Brice the boys 'n the glass-mill called me. I wuz blowed up in a glass-mill oncet." The speaker turned to show an ugly scar on his neck. "Did n't know where I wuz fer six weeks — thought I had n't lit. When I come to, there wuz Loisy potterin' over me; but I ain't been rugged sence."

"Married?"

The man's answer broke through the patient homeliness of his face at once. He fumbled in his pocket silently, like one who has no common disclosure to make.

"What d' ye think o' them, stranger?"

Joel took the little, rusty, black case in his hands reverently. A woman's face, not grand, nor fair even, some bits of tawdry finery making its plainness plainer; and beside it a round-eyed boy plumped into a high chair, with two little feet sticking sturdily out in Joel's face.

Mrs. Brandt looked over her husband's shoulder with kindly curiosity.

"The boy favors you amazingly about the mouth; but he 's got his mother's eyes, and they 're sharp, knowin' eyes, too. He 's a bright one, I 'll be bound."

"Yours, I reckon?"

"Yes, that 's Loisy an' the boy," fighting the conscious pride in his voice like one who tries to wear his honors meekly.

He took the well-worn case again, gazing into the two faces an instant with helpless yearning, and returned it to its place. The very way he handled it was a caress, fastening the little brass hook with scrupulous care.

"I 'll be sendin' fur 'em when I git red o' this pesterin' cough."

II.

A very quiet, unobtrusive guest Mrs. Brandt found the man Brice; talking little save in a sudden gush of confidence, and always of his wife and child; choosing a quiet corner of the kitchen in the chill California nights, where he watched his hostess's deft movements with wistful admiration.

"Try huntin', Brice; the doctors mostly say it 's healthy."

And Brice tried hunting, as Joel advised, taking the gun from its crotch over the door after breakfast, and wandering for hours in the yellow, wine-like air of the

mesa. He came in at noon and nightfall always empty-handed, yet no one derided his failure. There was something about the man that smothered derision.

"A sort o' thunderin' patience that knocks a fellow," Bert Fox put it.

Mrs. Brandt had always an encouraging word for the hunter.

"Greasewood 's bad fer huntin'. Joel says it don't pay to look fer quail in the brush when he does fetch 'em down."

"Like enough. I dunno, ma'am. Reckon I 've had a good many shots at the little wild critters, but they allus turn their heads so kind o' innocent like. A man as has been blowed up oncet hisself ain't much at separatin' fam'lies. But I s'pose it ain't the shootin' that 's healthy, mebbe."

And so the hunting came to an end without bloodshed. Whether the doctors were right, or whether it was the mingled resin and honey of the sage and chaparral, no one cared to ask. Certain it is that the "pesterin' cough" yielded a little, and the bent form grew a trifle more erect.

"I think likely it 's the lookin' up, ma'am. Mountains seem to straighten a fellow some

way. 'Pears to me somebody writ oncet uv liftin' his eyes to the hills fer help. Mebbe not, though. I ain't much at recollectin' verses. Loisy's a powerful hand that way."

Perhaps the man was right. It was the looking up.

He followed Joel from the table one morning, stopping outside, his face full of patient eagerness.

"I'm gittin' right smart o' strength, neighbor. Ef there's odd jobs you could gi' me; I'd be slow, mebbe, but seems like 'most anything 'ud be better 'n settin' 'round."

Joel scratched his head reflectively. The big, brawny-handed fellow felt no disposition to smile at his weak brother.

"Fox and I wuz sayin' yesterday we'd like to put another man on the ditch; it'll be easy work fer a week, till we strike rock again. Then there's the greasewood. It's always on hand. You might take it slow, grubbin' when you wuz able. I guess we'll find you jobs enough, man."

The scarred, colorless face brightened.

"Thank ye, neighbor. Ef you'll be so

kind, there 's another little matter. I 'll have a trifle over when I 've paid your woman fer her trouble. I wuz thinkin' like enough you 'd let me run up a shanty on yer place here. Loisy would n't mind about style — just a roof to bring 'em to. It 's fer her and the boy, you know," watching Joel's face eagerly.

"Yes, yes, Brice; we 'll make it all right. Just take things kind o' easy. I 'll be goin' in with wood next week, and I 'll fetch you out a load o' lumber. We 'll make a day of it after 'while, and put up your house in a jiffy."

And so Brice went to work on the ditch, gently at first, spared from the heaviest work by strong arms and rough kindliness. And so, ere long, another rude dwelling went up on the mesa, the blue smoke from its fireside curling slowly toward the pine-plumed mountain-tops.

The building fund, scanty enough at best, was unexpectedly swelled by a sudden and obstinate attack of forgetfulness which seized good Mrs. Brandt.

"No, Brice, you have n't made me a spark o' trouble, not a spark. I 'm sure you 've

paid your way twice over bringin' in wood, and grindin' coffee, an' the like. Many a man 'd asked wages for the half you 've done, so I 'm gettin' off easy to call it square." And the good lady stood her ground unflinchingly.

"You 've been powerful good to me, ma'am. We 'll be watchin' our chance to make it up to you, — Loisy an' me. I 'll be sendin' fer Loisy d'reckly now."

"Yes, yes, man, and there 'll be bits o' furniture and things to get. Spread your money thin, and Mrs. Fox and me 'll come in and put you to rights when you 're lookin' for her."

He brought the money to Joel at last, a motley collection of gold and silver pieces.

"Ef ye 'll be so kind as to send it to 'er, neighbor, — Mrs. Loisy Brice, Plattsville, Indianny. I 've writ the letter tellin' her how to come. There 's enough fer the ticket and a trifle to spare. The boy 's a master hand at scuffin' out shoes an' things. You 'll not make any mistake sendin' it, will you?"

"No, no, Brice; it 'll go straight as a rocket. Let me see now. The letter 'll

be a week, then 'lowin' 'em a week to get started" —

"Loisy won't be a week startin', neighbor."

"Never you mind, man. 'Lowin' 'em a week to get off, that's two weeks; then them emigrant trains is slow, say thirteen days on the road, — that's about another fortnight, — four weeks; this is the fifth, ain't it? Twenty-eight and five's thirty-three; that 'll be the third o' next month, say. Now mind what I tell you, Brice; don't look fer 'em a minute before the third, — not a minute."

"'Pears like a long spell to wait, neighbor."

"I know it, man; but it 'll seem a thunderin' sight longer after you begin to look fer 'em."

"I reckon you 're right. Say four weeks from to-day, then. Like enough you 'll be goin' in."

"Yes, we 'll hitch up and meet 'em at the train, — you and me. The women 'll have things kind o' snug ag'in' we git home. Four weeks 'll soon slide along, man."

Joel went into the house smiling softly.

"I had to be almost savage with the fellow, Barbara. The anxious seat 's no place fer a chap like him; it 'd wear him to a toothpick in a week."

"But she might get here before that, you know, Joel."

"I 'll fix that with the men at the depot. If she comes sooner we 'll have her out here in a hurry. Wish to goodness she would."

III.

The Southern winter blossomed royally. Bees held high carnival in the nodding spikes of the white sage, and now and then a breath of perfume from the orange groves in the valley came up to mingle with the wild mountain odors. Brice worked every moment with feverish earnestness, and the pile of gnarled roots on the clearing grew steadily larger. With all her loveliness, Nature failed to woo him. What was the exquisite languor of those days to him but so many hours of patient waiting? The dull eyes saw nothing of the lavish beauty around him then, looking through it all with restless yearning to where an emigrant

train, with its dust and dirt and noisome breath, crawled over miles of alkali, or hung from dizzy heights.

"To-morrow 's the third, neighbor. I reckon she 'll be 'long now d'reckly."

"That 's a fact; what a rattler time is!" The days had not been long to Joel. "We 'll go in to-morrow, and if they don't come you can stay and watch the trains awhile. She won't know you, Brice; you 've picked up amazingly."

"I think likely Loisy 'll know me if she comes."

But she did not come. Joel returned the following night alone, having left Brice at cheap lodgings near the station. Numberless passers-by must have noticed the patient watcher at the incoming trains, the homely pathos of his face deepening day by day, the dull eyes growing a shade duller, and the awkward form a trifle more stooped with each succeeding disappointment. It was two weeks before he reappeared on the mesa, walking wearily like a man under a load.

"I reckon there 's something wrong, ma'am. I come out to see ef yer man 'ud

write me a letter. I had n't been long in Plattsville, but I worked a spell fer a man named Yarnell; like enough he 'd look it up a little. I ain't much at writin', an' I 'd want it all writ out careful like, you know." The man's voice had the old, uncomplaining monotony.

Joel wrote the letter at once, making the most minute inquiries regarding Mrs. Brice, and giving every possible direction concerning her residence. Then Brice fell back into the old groove, working feverishly, in spite of Mrs. Brandt's kindly warnings.

"I can't stop, ma'am; the settin' 'round 'ud kill me."

The answer came at last, a businesslike epistle, addressed to Joel. Mrs. Brice had left Plattsville about the time designated. Several of her neighbors remembered that a stranger, a well-dressed man, had been at the house for nearly a week before her departure, and the two had gone away together, taking the Western train. The writer regretted his inability to give further information, and closed with kindly inquiries concerning his former employee's

health, and earnest commendation of him to Mr. Brandt.

Joel read the letter aloud, something — some sturdy uprightness of his own, no doubt — blinding him to its significance.

"Will you read it ag'in, neighbor? I 'm not over-quick."

The man's voice was a revelation full of an unutterable hurt, like the cry of some dumb wounded thing.

And Joel read it again, choking with indignation now at every word.

"Thank ye, neighbor. I 'll trouble you to write a line thankin' him; that 's all."

He got up heavily, staggering a little as he crossed the floor, and went out into the yellow sunlight. There was the long, sun-kissed slope, the huge pile of twisted roots, the rude shanty with its clambering vines. The humming of bees in the sage went on drowsily. Life, infinitely shrunken, was life still. A more cultured grief might have swooned or cried out. This man knew no such refuge; even the poor relief of indignation was denied to him. None of the thousand wild impulses that come to men smitten like him flitted across his

clouded brain. He only knew to take up his burden dumbly and go on. If he had been wiser, could he have known more?

No one spoke of the blow that had fallen upon him. The sympathy that met him came in the warmer clasp of hard hands and the softening of rough voices, none the worse certainly for its quietness. Alone with her husband, however, good Mrs. Brandt's wrath bubbled incessantly.

"It 's a crying, burning, blistering shame, Joel, that 's what it is. I s'pose it 's the Lord's doings, but I can't see through it."

"If the Lord 's up to that kind o' business, Barbara, I don't see no further use fer the devil," was the dry response.

These plain, honest folk never dreamed of intruding upon their neighbor's grief with poor suggestions of requital. Away in the city across the mountains men babbled of remedies at law. But this man's hurt was beyond the jurisdiction of any court. Day by day the hollow cough grew more frequent, and the awkward step slower. Nobody asked him to quit his work now. Even Mrs. Brandt shrank from the patient misery of his face when idle. He

came into her kitchen one evening, choosing the old quiet corner, and following her with his eyes silently.

"Is there anything lackin', Brice?" The woman came and stood beside him, the great wave of pity in her heart welling up to her voice and eyes.

"Nothin', ma'am, thank ye. I've been thinkin'," he went on, speaking more rapidly than was his wont, "an' I dunno. You 've knowed uv people gettin' wrong in their minds, I s'pose. They wuz mostly smart, knowin' chaps, wuz n't they?" the low, monotonous voice growing almost sharp with eagerness. "I reckon you never knowed of any one not over-bright gittin' out of his head, ma'am?"

"I would n't talk o' them things, Brice. Just go on and do your best, and if there 's any good, or any right, or any justice, you 'll come out ahead; that 's about all we know, but it 's enough if we stick to it."

"I reckon you 're right, ma'am. 'Pears sometimes, though, as ef anything 'ud be better 'n the thinkin'."

IV.

It all came to an end one afternoon. Brice was at work on the ditch again, preferring the cheerful companionship of Joel and Bert Fox to his own thoughts, and Mrs. Brandt was alone in her kitchen. Two shadows fell across the worn threshold, and a weak, questioning voice brought the good woman to her door instantly.

"Good-day to you, ma'am. Is there a man named Brice livin' nigh here anywhere?"

It was a woman's voice, — a woman with some bits of tawdry ornament about her, and a round-eyed boy clinging bashfully to her skirts.

Mrs. Brandt brought them into the house, urging the stranger to rest a bit and get her breath.

"Thank you, ma'am; I 'd like to be movin' on. Do you know if he 's well, — the man Brice? We 're his wife an' boy."

The woman told her story presently, when Mrs. Brandt had induced her to wait there until the men came home, — told it

with no unnecessary words, and her listener made no comment.

"My brother come a week afore we was leavin', an' he helped us off an' come as fur as Omaha. He 'd done well out in Nebrasky, an' he give me right smart o' money when he left. I was took sick on the road, — I disremember jest where, — an' they left me at a town with a woman named Dixon. She took care o' me. I was out o' my head a long time, an' when I come to I told 'em to write to Brice, an' they writ, an' I reckon they took the name of the place from the ticket. I was weak like fer a long spell, an' they kep' a writin' an' no word come, an' then I recollected about the town, — it was Los Angeles on the ticket, — and then I could n't think of the place I 'd sent the letters to before, an' the thinkin' worrited me, an' the doctor said I must n't try. So I jest waited, an' when I got to Los Angeles I kep' a-askin' fer a man named Brandt, till one day somebody said, 'Brandt? Brandt? 'pears to me there 's a Brandt 'way over beyond the Mission.' And then it come to me all at oncet that the place I 'd writ to was San Gabriel Mission. An' I went

there an' they showed me your house. Then a man give us a lift on his team part o' the way, an' we walked the rest. It did n't look very fur, but they say mountains is deceivin'. There 's somethin' kind o' grand about 'em, I reckon; it makes everything 'pear sort o' small."

Mrs. Brandt told Joel about it that evening.

"I just took the two of 'em up to the shanty, and opened the door, and you 'd a cried to see how pleased she was with everything. And I told her to kindle a fire and I 'd fetch up a bite o' supper. And when I 'd carried it up and left it, I just come back and stood on the step till I saw Brice comin' home. He was walkin' slow, as if his feet was a dead weight, and when he took hold o' the door he stopped a minute, lookin' over the valley kind o' wishful and hopeless. I guess she heard him come, for she opened the door, and I turned around and come in. 'Barbara Brandt,' says I, 'you 've seen your see. If God wants to look at that, I suppose He has a right to; nobody else has, that 's certain.' "